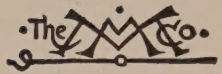
ISABEL CARLETON'S FRIENDS

Margaret Ashmun

Dear Bennie
11th Birthday
1925
From
Aunt Annie
&
Uncle Sam

ISABEL CARLETON'S FRIENDS



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The lunch was a very gay one, eaten as the four sat about a grassy space, sheltered by rocks and a fallen tree, over which a vine was climbing.

ISABEL CARLETON'S FRIENDS

BY

MARGARET ASHMUN
Author of "Isabel Carleton's Year," "The Heart of Isabel Carleton," etc.

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EDWARD C. CASWELL

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TO
MY MOTHER

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ISABEL CARLETON'S FRIENDS

CHAPTER I

THE PROMISE OF SPRING

ONE April afternoon, Isabel Carleton and Meta Houston emerged, talking and laughing, from Main Hall, which crowned the hill at the great State University at Jefferson. Their college classes were over for the day, and they were ready to take a leisurely course homeward. The day was clear and brilliant. The sun was warm without being oppressive, and the fresh spring wind blew across the lake in long caressing gusts that fluttered the garments of the students who were straggling down the Hill.

The two girls paused at the top of the slope, and looked down the campus, where the grass had thrown a thin wave of green over the brown herbage of the year before. The lines of elms which bordered the walks were faintly touched with the color of new leaves, and the maples showed a burst of carmine buds. The rows of trees continued, past the Library and the Administration Building, and down State Street to the marble Capitol, a mile away.

"How bright it seems, after the dull class-rooms," said Isabel. "I always wonder why people want to bother with things in books, when the world is so fascinating out-of-doors."

"That's what I think," answered Meta. "When a spring day like this comes on, I wonder why I'm not riding a broncho in Montana, instead of walking primly around with my two feet on a sidewalk."

"It must be wonderful to ride over the plains like that," replied Isabel half-enviously; —"just to go sweeping along with the wind in your hair, and the blue horizon in your eyes,— I could become almost poetic even thinking about it."

"It is wonderful and poetic," said Meta with a sigh. "Maybe you'll have a chance to see what it is like, yourself. And yet," she went on more briskly, "it's splendid here, Isabel. I love Jefferson, and I love the University, and I love you!"

Isabel turned and smiled at her companion. Meta's dark hair and her handsome defiant face were in striking contrast to the blond coloring and quiet gray eyes of Isabel. Meta was wearing a very fresh and stylish suit, and a black hat with a stiff red quill, which gave her a dashing look; the younger girl was dressed more simply in blue serge, and a hat with a wreath of foliage and berries.

"We're glad we found each other, aren't we, Meta?" said Isabel. "It's queer how offish we were at first, and how suspiciously we regarded each other!" The decided differences in the types of the two girls had caused some of their acquaintances to marvel at their friendship.

"I don't know that it is so queer, considering,"

Meta replied. "I wasn't very nice to you. I don't know what possessed me."

"Nor I to you," echoed Isabel. "But I do know what possessed *me*. However — why speak of what's over? Have you decided what you are going to wear in the third act?"

"Oh, that's what I wanted to ask you about," said Meta quickly. "I thought of a lovely gown — corn-colored satin, with tulle draperies of the same tone, and gold lace. Don't you think that would be right? Althea is supposed to have dressed herself up rather gorgeously, so as to make an impression on her guests, you know."

"I think that would be perfect," Isabel answered, her eyes alight with the vision of the gorgeous gown. "It sounds absolutely *comme il faut*. And you'll look like a — a bird of paradise in it, Meta!"

"Well, I shan't be in Paradise, though," said Meta with a grimace. "I can never tell when I'm going to have stage fright."

"You always seem so self-possessed."

"There are times when my behavior conceals my feelings. About the dress — I thought I'd better plan it a long time beforehand, so that I could get the right dressmaker, and not have any complications at the last."

The girls walked on down the Hill, discussing the Red Domino play in which, somewhat later, Meta was to have a leading part. Presently they came to the street that led to Isabel's home. "Come on with me," said Isabel, shifting her books, which were heavy tomes on historical subjects; "it's awfully early yet,— look at the sun. We'll be having tea,

you know, and besides, I want to tell you about something I've planned."

"I don't need to be urged," laughed Meta. "But I sometimes wonder whether your mother doesn't imagine she has another daughter — I'm at her house so much."

"She loves to have you there," Isabel returned. "If all her daughters gave her as little trouble as you do, she wouldn't have much to think about."

"She's been splendid to me," said Meta wistfully. "I almost feel sometimes as if I had a mother of my own."

"I'm glad I can share mine with you." Isabel gave Meta's arm a pat with her free hand. In her heart she was saying, "How dreadful not to have a mother! How can she bear the thought?"

They walked silently down the street until they came to the simple white house in which the Carletons lived. Isabel ran up the steps and threw open the door, with the *whoo-hoo* that was a family signal.

The voice of Mrs. Carleton floated down the stairs, though she herself could not be seen. "Is that you, Isabel?"

"Yes, Honey-Mother, and I've brought Meta. We're going to plan a Hesperian garden in the back yard."

"I'm not sure that I know what kind that is, but I'll take it for granted. I'm glad you came, Meta. Stay for tea, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed, I shall, thank you," called Meta.

Isabel put her books on the hall table, and the two girls went through the house, and out at the dining room door to the side porch, thence to the

back yard. "Ah, the lovely sunshine again," breathed Isabel. "Thank heaven our long winter is over! Good day, Mr. Hogan."

"Good day to ye, ma'am," answered Mr. Hogan, with his pipe in his teeth; both his hands were occupied with the task of fastening the rambler roses against the trellis at the back of the house. Mr. Hogan was a small Irish man-of-all-work whom the Carletons employed on various occasions.

"Did father ask you to spade up the garden for me, a little later?" asked Isabel.

"He did that, Miss, and I'll be at it before I'm many days older. I hear ye're keen for raisin' things this year."

"I am keen for it," admitted Isabel cheerfully. "I'm going to do wonders here in the garden."

Mr. Hogan grunted. "The ladies is always keen for a garden before weedin' time comes," he mumbled. "They're all right for what you may call initial enthusiasm, but they fall down when it's a question of sustaining the situation." His eyes twinkled as he looked over his shoulder at the girls.

"You'll see that I'm different," protested Isabel, somewhat chagrined at the little man's frank skepticism.

"Yes, they all think they are." Isabel was a great favorite with Mr. Hogan, but he had known her since her childhood, and felt privileged to tease her. "But by the time ye've got your pretty white fingers all dir-rty, and your back's achin' like a sore tooth, you'll be glad to call on Hogan, so ye will."

"You'll see!" repeated Isabel, with a laugh. She turned to Meta, who had been listening to the

conversation with a smile of appreciation. "You believe in me, anyway, don't you, Lady Clara Vere de Vere?"

"Of course I do, on general principles," said Meta. "I'll have to hear more about this particular plan. Oh, there's a blue-bird! What a jewel of a color!"

"Lovely thing!" Isabel stood watching the bit of exquisite blue fluttering in the shrubbery. Her face was rapt. "I wonder if he dreams how beautiful he is? There! he has flitted away, and left us all-forlorn. Now listen, Meta: I'm going to have a garden of my own this spring. I've been meditating about it in the still watches of the night, as the poets say. I think I ought to get out and have that much contact with the earth."

"As busy as you are?" said Meta doubtfully.

"Well, of course I'm scandalously busy; but I feel that this is important. I can eliminate a few silly teas, or some strolls around the Square, or chats about nothing in the corridors of Main Hall."

"Those things may not be so easily eliminated as you suppose," Meta replied. "You can't stop a person in the middle of his remarks, and say, 'Excuse me, but I haven't time to listen to you; I have to go home and weed the onions'!"

"I could," said Isabel stoutly. "And anyway, I'm not going to have onions. It's a lot easier to say, 'Kindly pardon my seeming lack of appreciation of your stimulating discourse; but I find that I must now seek my domestic shelter, and minister to the needs of my forget-me-nots.'"

"That sounds better. But even so, I doubt

whether anybody, especially a man, would ever make another attempt to engage you in social conversation, after a snub like that."

"Humph! If they were so easily scared as that, I don't think I'd care much about 'em anyway. Besides, I believe the right sort of man would say eagerly, 'Oh, do permit me to assist you in this noble work!'"

"Rodney and George would, I'm sure," said Meta rather absently. She had stooped to peep between the leaves of some tulips which were sprouting along the walk. "It won't be long till they're in bloom," she exclaimed. "And oh, do look! The irises have a touch of purple in the buds. They'll blossom in a few days."

The girls walked on around the garden. "I wish the clothes-reel didn't take up so much room," grumbled Isabel. "But I suppose it's a necessary evil. I like the brick wall at the end of the lot, anyway, and those half-grown Lombardy poplars. We can feel rather shut-in and by ourselves."

"It's beyond criticism," said Meta with a sigh. "Are those hollyhock stalks over there?"

"Yes. You didn't see them when they were blazing in rows last year, did you? We didn't know each other then." Isabel put her hand on Meta's shoulder. "Now, look at this arbor. It's a sad sight. It looked awfully scraggy last fall. I'm going to have quick-growing vines over it — morning-glories and red beans — and we can have tea out here, and read and chat. In Europe, you know, they live out in the garden so much of the time. I don't think we do it half enough."

"There are times when you'd have to live out here with a coal-stove or a swimming-suit," smiled Meta, who liked to poke fun at Isabel's enthusiasms.

While the girls stood talking, they heard a whistle from the porch. They turned quickly, and saw Rodney Fox and George Burnham, who had just come out of the house. The young men lifted their hats and came down the path.

"Good afternoon," said Rodney. "Rambling among the roses?" He looked humorously about at the bare stalks and withered leaves of the garden.

"Rambling where the roses are going to be," returned Isabel.

"There are two here, now, at least," said Burnham, with a bow first to Isabel and then to Meta. The girls laughed and flushed.

"Why didn't I think of that? George, you're a genius," said Rodney.

"It's easy to be, with such inspiration," retorted George. "How could any man be less?"

"I find it extremely easy to be a good deal less," complained Rodney. But he looked very happy, in spite of his tone. His brown eyes were bright and eager; and his cheeks showed a healthy red. He wore a Norfolk jacket and the corduroy trousers affected by the engineering students at the University. Burnham, a goodlooking young man with dark blue eyes and a great quantity of reddish brown hair, was dressed conventionally in a business suit.

"I can only stay a minute," he went on apologetically. "I had to go up to the University Library to look up something for my chief, and Rod

caught me on the way back." Burnham was an assistant in the office of the Board of Public Works, at the Capitol. "You see," he explained, "I don't belong to the idle group of college students who have nothing to do but loaf around."

"Loaf!" protested Rodney in an injured voice. "Well, I like that. I loaf — about as much as a mule in a tread-mill. If I refresh myself now and then with the society of the ladies, that's no proof that I'm not a slave to my profession."

"It proves that you have good judgment as well as leisure," returned Burnham. "I used to think that I worked hard in college, but now I see that I was a gilded butterfly of gayety."

"Well, don't argue," interrupted Isabel. "Look at my arbor. It's rather unpromising at present, but I'm going to furbish it up and have all sorts of *al fresco* goings-on out here."

"Isabel yearns for a garden all her own," put in Meta. "There was a time when Isabella was contented with a Pot of Basil. Now she wants a whole garden-plot."

"I can't imagine whose head she'll get to put into it," spoke up Rodney, proud of knowing his Keats. "I refuse to give up mine. I need it in my business."

"Oh, I don't know," said George easily. "Perhaps you'd never miss it."

Rodney glared. "Anyway," he conceded, "if I lose my head, I'll know where to look for it."

"You'll be like the man in *Pickwick,*" cried Isabel merrily. "You remember, he was eating his lunch on the top of a bus, when they went under a low

bridge; and all at once, so the book says, he found himself with 'sandwich in hand, and no mouth to put it in.' If you'll wait, though, you'll get one while you have a mouth to put it into. We're going to have tea out here."

"Don't worry. I'll wait." Rodney planted himself firmly on a bench.

"I'm sorry, but I can't," said Burnham. "I have to get back before the office closes. I'm a man of affairs, as I before assured you."

"Too bad," said Rodney, "just when the 'eats' are coming on. You don't show real common sense, Burn."

"Trust *you,* though," commented Burnham.

"You'll come to the rummage-sale-*de-luxe* for the Belgian Relief to-morrow, won't you?" asked Meta. "I'm going to be a 'sales person' there, you know — and so is Isabel."

"Saturday? Oh, yes. We working men are free on Saturday afternoon. I'll be there, very willingly." Burnham was taking a reluctant leave.

"I'm sorry you have to go," said the hostess. She walked to the porch with him.

He went around to the front of the house, and Isabel stepped to the kitchen door. "Olga, kind creature," she said, looking into the kitchen, "will you make the tea in the two thermos bottles, and let us know when it's ready?"

Olga was putting the roast into the oven. "Yes, Miss Isabel," she said, turning her head to give Isabel an assuring smile. "I have it ready in a minute or two."

"Thank you, Olga." Isabel went back to where

Meta and Rodney were talking, as they sat on the bench near the arbor.

"We were just speaking of the University Circus," said Rodney, as he got up to give Isabel his place. "It comes next week, you know."

"Yes. I'm so glad I can see it," said Meta. "I wasn't here for the last one, since it comes only once in two years."

"Nor I," said Isabel. "But I've seen several. They're great fun; and the Engineers always do the lion's share of the work. What are you going to do to help the cause along, Rod?"

"I'm going to be a performing ape." Rodney crinkled his eyes with amusement.

"What sport," laughed Meta. "Did you really say an ape, Rodney?"

"They put people into the rôles for which they seem to be best fitted, don't they, Rod?" Isabel spoke gravely, but her eyes were dancing.

"Now, Isabel, don't be a cat! It's no disgrace to appear as an ape. The Monkey Family are our nearest relatives."

"What sort of disguise are you going to wear?" asked Meta.

"A brown canton costume with a rope tail. I'll be as good looking an ape as you've seen in a long time."

"As good looking as most of those that move in University circles," assented Isabel.

"I love these college stunts," Meta cried, buttoning her coat, for the wind was getting cool. "We certainly have had some good times this year, haven't we?"

"Yes." Rodney's face was thoughtful. "It seems selfish to be having such good times when other people are suffering."

"But it wouldn't do any good for more people to suffer," said Isabel in a practical tone, as if she were defending herself.

"By the way," Rodney began again, after a pause, "I had a letter from Herb this morning." He was speaking of Herbert Barry, one of his fraternity brothers, who had gone to France, in the fall, to do ambulance work.

"What did he say?" asked Isabel eagerly. "He never sends me anything but cards, you know."

"Oh, he's having a wonderful time — terrible, you know, but thrilling. He says he never knew that living could be so intense — have so much crowded into it. He says one's own little personal affairs shrink into nothing beside this great catastrophe and the work there is to do."

"I suppose so." Isabel looked absently at the row of withered hollyhock stems against the wall. She was thinking of the hurt which Herbert Barry had carried away in his heart. She wondered if it were healed. It must be, in the midst of events so much more important than one's own little personal affairs — one's aspirations and affections.

"Strange," Meta was saying —"a fastidious man like Herbert, with his sensitive nature, enduring the horrors of ambulance service in France."

"I don't know that it is," returned Rodney quickly. "People of that kind are often the most self-forgetful, when a great occasion offers."

A silence fell on the group. It was broken only

by the laughter of some children playing in the Lenners' yard, next door, and a distant whistle from the little steamer on the lake.

"I sometimes think we ought all to be at it," said Rodney at last, in a low voice.

The girls did not answer.

Olga came out on the porch and waved. Rodney sprang to his feet, as if relieved, and went to bring the tea. He came back bearing a big tin tray, with the thermos bottles set out upon it; and cups, spoons, sugar, cream, and lemon. Rodney made another trip for the sandwiches and cake.

"Here, put the tray on top of this barrel," said Isabel. "It has been used to shelter the yellow rosebush during the winter. We must have the wicker table brought down from the attic," she added in a businesslike tone. "When I get my bower arranged, we'll be sipping ambrosia out here most of the time."

"Is brewing ambrosia one of Olga's strong points?" murmured Meta. "If not, I think I'll stick to tea."

"You don't seem to think I might be able to brew it," answered Isabel busy with the cups. "See if this doesn't serve the purpose." She poured out three cups of tea, which steamed in the cool air. The wind had grown fresh and cutting. A robin began to sing loudly in the poplars. "Bless his little happy heart," Isabel cried, as she poured a generous supply of cream into her own cup.

Just then Mrs. Carleton came down the walk, in a white wool coat, with a blue veil over her hair. She had very pink cheeks and brown hair with only

now and then a thread of gray. She walked with the light step of one who finds life very full and very satisfying.

"We're so glad you've come, mother," cried Isabel joyfully. "I had begun to think you'd gone out."

"No. I had to telephone a lot of people on some Woman's Club business. I was detained. Father's still at the Faculty meeting, I suppose."

"Take my seat," entreated Meta.

"Let me pour you some tea," said Rodney, reaching for the thermos bottle. "Drink yours while it's hot, Isabel."

In the midst of pleasant chatter, Mrs. Carleton was made to accept repose and refreshment.

The back door opened and slammed, and Celia came romping down the walk in her warm red jersey. She was carrying Bobo, her big gray cat, who stared solemnly from her arms, sniffing the odor of the sandwiches.

"Oh, I'm so hungry!" called Celia shrilly. "I hope you have heaps and heaps of things to eat."

"Smaller heaps than we had when we began," rejoined Isabel; "but you may have a bite. Here's a fat sandwich. Put down Big Bobo-Cat."

Celia dropped the cat, and he climbed at once to the top of the arbor, so that he could fix his greedy gaze on the robin in the poplars. It fluttered its wings in quick alarm, and flew away. Celia, eating her sandwich, called out in derision, "Serves you right, bad cat!" while the others went on with their talk.

"It seems so good to be out of doors," said Mrs.

Carleton, " and to know that we've seen the last of winter, for a while, at least."

" That's what we've all been exclaiming, individually and collectively," cried Isabel. " But it has been an interesting and happy winter to me — after my long year away from home; it was a long year, even though I was seeing Europe and having the time of my life. It seems only a little while since I got back in September."

" We've all been so busy, we haven't noticed how the weeks have flashed away," said Meta, fixing her dark eyes significantly on Mrs. Carleton. " It has been the best winter I have ever had — thanks to some dear friends who shall be nameless."

" We're so glad to be together, in these terrible times of separation," murmured Isabel, putting down her cup and drawing her coat collar up about her throat.

" We are that," said Rodney.

The group was silent again. Isabel was thinking of Molly Ramsay and Herbert Barry, both of whom had left the little circle of friends; and one, at least, was never coming back.

" The sandwiches are all gone," chirped Celia; " and it's getting awful cold out here. Why don't we go into the house, and build a fire in the grate? "

" We will in a minute, Celia-Bird," answered Isabel. " But we want to watch the sun go down."

Celia ran to find Bobo, who had concealed himself behind the arbor; and the others sat watching the sun dipping down into the clear pale blue of the west. Each one was thinking about the promise of happiness in the coming months of the spring.

CHAPTER II

A GREEN PLATE AND A YELLOW JAR

THE " rummage-sale-*de-luxe*," for the benefit of the Belgian Relief, was held on Friday and Saturday of each week; the women of the faculty and of the town brought out all sorts of treasured articles — household goods, wearing apparel, and bits of bric-a-brac, to be sold for the welfare of the suffering Belgians.

On Saturday noon Isabel was collecting the things which she was to take with her that afternoon, when she was to act as a " saleslady."

" Mother," she called from the pantry, " here's that majolica plate that Aunt Felicia gave you. You're always afraid that it's going to get broken, and you don't really like it very well, anyway — it's so fearfully green. Don't you think it would be nice to get rid of it? "

" Why, I suppose it might as well go," answered Mrs. Carleton, coming to the pantry door. " Somebody may like it better than I do. I feel guilty to say it, but I should be glad if I didn't have to see it around any more."

" I thought so," remarked Isabel. She wiped the plate carefully on a glass-towel. " And I brought down that carved Swiss watch-rack of father's, from the shelf in the hall closet. He never uses it. I might take that over to the sales-room."

"He will never know that it's gone," assented Mrs. Carleton, as she and Isabel went back into the dining room. "But are you contributing only the articles that belong to your relatives?" she queried humorously. "It's easy to be generous with other people's things."

"Now, mother, that's unfair," returned Isabel in a hurt voice. "Do you honestly think I'm like that? I'm giving that lovely little mosaic pin that I got in Naples. Of course I have the big jade pin that Madame Doret gave me, and one or two others, and I can get along without the mosaic, though I do love it. And I'm giving the filet lace doily that I made out of the Venetian square; and —"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," smiled Mrs. Carleton. "I thought it wasn't like you to be so high-handed. I laid out one or two things on the hall table for you to take with you. You'll bring back some of the girls for dinner, won't you?"

"Yes; I asked Meta, and Miss Meade,— she and I are getting to be good friends, for we like the same things so much, you know."

"I like her, too," replied Mrs. Carleton. "Well, I'll tell Olga, then, how many there are to be. I hope you'll have a nice afternoon, dear."

"I'm sure I shall, Mummy. Don't give me a thought till I come back."

"I can't promise that," said Mrs. Carleton, as she turned away to go to the kitchen.

On her way upstairs for her wraps, Isabel stopped to look at the things which her mother had laid out on the hall table: a beautiful little water-color in a hand-carved frame; a *jabot* of creamy Alençon lace;

an old silver box which had "come down" in the family from the days of wafer-sealed letters. "Dear mother!" said Isabel to herself, in real dismay, "she has given the things that she loved the very best, I do believe." The girl took up the lace in unsteady fingers. "I know it must have been a terrific sacrifice to part with this; it's such a lovely piece, and some old friend or other gave it to her when she was married!"

Isabel went on upstairs feeling that her own contributions were rather small. She dressed hurriedly, and was soon starting for the hall where the sale was held. The brilliant April sunshine of yesterday had faded, and the sky was dull and gray. There was an occasional spurt of rain. Isabel walked briskly along with her umbrella up. She had put on a long rain-coat over her green silk dress, made over from the year before.

Arrived at the hall, she found Meta already there, looking very handsome in a gown of rose-colored broadcloth. People who did the selling were expected to "dress up," so that the occasion might seem all the more festive and alluring.

"I came early, so that I could arrange the tables," explained Meta. "They looked so jumbled last time, when Caroline Harper and Mrs. Rausch had them. See — isn't that nice? Miss Meade and I have gone over everything."

"Oh, that's fine!" cried Isabel, as she took off her coat. The tables were covered with some lengths of soft old gray cashmere, against which the varied articles, arranged in related groups, stood out with tempting clearness.

"Miss Meade knows exactly how things should go," said Meta, "and I can make my hands useful if I have to."

"Some of the things are very choice, aren't they?" Isabel took up a bit of ancient Croatian cross-stitch, and then a heavy silver table-spoon.

"It must be hard for people to let them go," meditated the other girl.

"But somebody else enjoys them. And think of the virtuous feeling that you get by giving up something, and also by purchasing something that somebody else has given up!"

"It's a complication of generosities, isn't it?" said Miss Meade, coming up to talk with the younger girls. She was a pleasant-faced young woman who taught interior decoration in the Home Arts department of the University. Her straight belted tunic of hand-dyed silk was as simple as it was distinctive.

"Oh, is that the batik-work you were doing the other day?" cried Isabel with her eyes on the tunic. She loved hand-work and distinctive things. "You make me break the tenth commandment."

"I'll show you how to do this if you like," answered Miss Meade generously. "And then you can batik, yourself."

"Not batik myself, I hope," laughed Isabel. "I'd be a pretty sight!"

"Look, Isabel," said Meta, after a minute. "Miss Meade gave this. Isn't it stunning?" She held up an orange-colored jar, a rich, stimulating piece of pottery with a dull glaze, most unusual and attractive.

"It was the most *joyous* thing I had," commented

Miss Meade. "I thought that somebody would love it."

"It's a gem," sighed Isabel. She held it affectionately. "It's the color I love most in the world. It suggests all sorts of beautiful things — orange-markets, and sunset, and maple-trees, and everything."

"People are coming in. We must fly," cried Meta. Isabel put down the jar and scurried to her place behind her table. For some time she was so busy with the unaccustomed task of selling and making change that she hardly noticed who came and went.

All at once, she heard a familiar childish voice; looking up, she saw Mrs. Mitchell, a friend of the Carletons, coming forward, leading Billy-Boy by the hand. Billy-Boy — going on five — was a great friend of Isabel's.

"Well, Isabel," began Mrs. Mitchell, a plump animated woman with curling brown hair, "this young man and I have been saving our pennies, and we want to help the Belgian kiddies."

"I've saved a lot," confided Billy-Boy. He took out a worn purse, and displayed a silver quarter and a number of nickels and pennies.

"My! that *is* a lot!" Isabel was properly impressed. "What are you going to get with it?"

Billy-Boy looked up with earnest blue eyes. "I s'pose I could get a whole lot of things with this. I want something for muvver's burfday, and then something for Milly, and oh, ever so many things for me —"

"I think you'll have to use all this for mother,

and then you can get something else after you've saved some more. Wouldn't that do?" coaxed the girl.

Billy-Boy nodded soberly. "Do you like that, muvver?" He pointed to a gleaming brass samovar, of unusual elegance.

"I don't believe I'd get that, dear," protested Mrs. Mitchell. "It's only twenty-five dollars!" she said laughingly, under her breath.

"Now here's something that you might like." Isabel held up a cup and saucer, bright and graceful, but not expensive. "Don't you think that would do?"

"It's pretty nice," responded Billy-Boy speculatively. "You could drink your coffee out of that, couldn't you, muvver?"

"I'd love it, darling."

The transaction was completed. Billy-Boy insisted on counting out the money twice, and on carrying the parcel himself. "Favver always carries things for you," he said reprovingly, when Mrs. Mitchell offered to put the cup and saucer into her bag.

Mrs. Mitchell was not quite ready to go. "Oh, there's one of those old-fashioned silver fruit-dishes," she said. "I believe I'll have to have that." While she was examining the fruit-dish, she looked up at Isabel with a quizzical smile. "You have such a happy look on your face, nowadays," she said. "For a long time after you came back, you looked troubled. There was a little cloud —"

"As big as a man's hand?" asked Isabel jestingly.

"Just about."

"Well, the man's hand didn't really have much to do with it. I think that a good deal of my distress was on Molly's account." Isabel was not smiling now. She looked down in pained silence at the articles on the table.

"But that hurt is better, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, so much better. The Fund has done so much to console me. Molly would be overjoyed to know how many girls have been helped, and how much it has meant to them."

"We have had a good time, working together, haven't we?" said Mrs. Mitchell. She and Isabel were both on the committee for managing the Mary Gaylord Ramsay Fund, in memory of one of Isabel's friends, who had been drowned in an accident on the lake. "It has been just as Molly would have liked."

"Yes, indeed," replied Isabel absently.

Mrs. Mitchell paid for the fruit-dish, and moved away to another table.

Isabel was selling a pair of ugly vases to a stout woman in a red hat, when she chanced to look over at Meta. An involuntary thrill, quickly suppressed, had shown in Meta's face as she looked toward the outer door. Following her gaze, Isabel saw that George Burnham had come in.

"Ah-h!" cried Isabel half-aloud. She felt as if she had discovered a secret unawares. Mm-h,—that was something to think about.

"I'll take them," said the stout woman in a loud tone, with a reproving air toward the inattentive young salesperson.

Isabel went to wrap them up. George was stand-

ing irresolutely with his hands in the pockets of his rain-coat. He was looking steadily and searchingly at Meta, who with a high color and a proud lift of the head was pretending not to see him.

"How perfectly unreasonable!" said Isabel to herself. "She asked him to come. Girls are certainly odd creatures. Yes, madam, two-sixty-five out of five. Here is the change."

Isabel was thinking about the little glimpse of emotions which she had witnessed; and a thin woman in a blue hat had to speak twice before the salesgirl waked up sufficiently to exhibit a drawn-work lunch-cloth which was pointed out. Even as she unfolded the cloth, Isabel found herself watching the door for another familiar form. "But I refuse to let my face give away *my* feelings," she resolved. "It's almost new; yes, it measures fully four feet; three dollars and a half. Besides, I don't care enough to bother. Shall I wrap it up, madam?"

"I think I won't take it," said the thin woman sourly.

"Oh, dear!" Isabel groaned. "I've lost a customer by not paying attention. I must concentrate on business."

She concentrated so well, and drove such a thriving trade, that she did not notice when Rodney Fox came in. She jumped when she heard a voice at her elbow: "You might give a fellow a sidelong glance, at least."

"Oh, I didn't know you were here, Rod. Let me see, how much are two dollars and eighty-five cents added to a dollar and thirty-five?" Isabel puckered her nose anxiously.

"It's four-twenty. Too bad they don't furnish you a patent adder."

"Gracious! that would be a snake in our Eden. Besides, you do very well as a rapid adder yourself. If you'll hang around, you can make yourself useful as well as ornamental. What would you like to see, Mrs. Caldwell?"

After a few more sales, in which Rodney helped to make change, there was a lull at the tables, while rain poured down viciously outside. Rodney, who had in the intervals been prowling about, came back to where Isabel was standing. "There's something over there that I want to buy for you," he said.

"Oh, what?" asked Isabel quickly. She hoped it wasn't that awful red plush glove-box. She had said some rash thing the other day about keeping everything in separate boxes, to save time. And then she remembered that she couldn't let him buy anything.

"It's that thing-a-ma-jig over on Meta's table, that bright orange-colored jug or whatever it is. I know you love that color."

"I do, Rod. It's lovely, but —"

"It makes me think of the way the woods were that day last fall, at Lake Kegonsah, when we made up. Do you remember?"

Oh, yes, Isabel remembered! Should she ever forget? She only nodded her head slowly as Rodney spoke. "Mother doesn't approve of presents, you know, Rod," she said carelessly. She was aching to possess the orange-colored jar.

"Well, this is such a good cause. The money would buy a lot of grub for the Belgians. And I haven't given you anything but a box of candy or a

flower or two since the Year of the Big Wind." His voice was very persuasive.

"You certainly are a talking serpent." Isabel hesitated. "We-ell, I cannot resist. I simply love the jug — or 'whatever it is,' as you say. Go on and waste your cash if you want to. Meta's trying to accumulate a fabulous sum to her credit this afternoon. It's awfully nice of you —"

But Rodney had hurried away to make his purchase. He came back with the jar wrapped in thin tissue paper, and gleaming in veiled splendor through its coverings. "We beg your acceptance of this elegant thimble," said he, handing the gift to Isabel. Behind the joking formula from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* the girl detected a note of tender satisfaction and triumph.

"Thank you, thank you. I shall love it." Isabel took the present with a grateful smile.

"And think of that day, every time you look at it?" persisted Rodney.

"M-huh," murmured the girl, with a sudden feeling of shyness. "Look, the rain is stopping, and people are coming in again." She turned to her table and Rodney stepped aside to speak to George, who had been buying recklessly at Meta's table.

At that moment Isabel saw her father coming in at the door. Then her heart did leap. "Dear father!" she thought. "I'd rather see him than any other man in the world. How nice he looks,— he's just had his hair and mustache trimmed."

Professor Carleton looked about, and then came forward to Isabel's table. He eyed his daughter inquiringly through his horn-rimmed glasses.

"Well, Little Girl, how are you getting along? Selling anything?"

"Oh, I should say so. I'm doing famously. I shall want to go into business for myself, pretty soon. You know, I always did want to keep a gift shop."

"Yes, but you could never bear to see your pet gifts go, I'm sure."

"That's the trouble," admitted the salesperson. "But I've hardened my heart here, and I keep thinking, every time I make a sale, 'There! that's an extra pound or two of bacon for the mothers, or that would buy two dozen cans of milk for the babies.'"

"A good idea, I'm sure. Now, let me see. I suppose I ought to buy something." The professor scrutinized the objects before him as if he hardly knew what they were. He picked up one or two articles vaguely, and put them down again.

"Father doesn't know any more about buying things than a nice absent-minded rabbit," thought Isabel in her secret heart.

But her father's eye was caught by something at the further side of the table. He leaned forward. "Ah! is that one of those carved Swiss watch-racks?" he asked in an interested tone.

Isabel stared at him, but he was looking at the rack, and did not notice her stupefied gaze. "Yes, father, that's what it is," she answered at last in a choked voice. She could scarcely believe her ears.

"Let me see it, please. I used to have one somewhat like that," said the professor genially; "but it seems to have disappeared in the course of events."

Isabel, her face very red, handed him the watch-rack. "It's a nice one," she said demurely; "lovely carving, and a light wood edelweiss set at the top, you see. It closes up so." Her white girlish fingers manipulated the curious carved hinge, which turned the watch-rack into a box.

"Yes, I know. Precisely like the one I had. Now, you know, I think this would be very useful on my desk, don't you, daughter?" Professor Carleton looked up over his glasses at the attentive young salesperson.

"Oh, very, father. It would be fine!" cried Isabel enthusiastically.

"I could keep my watch in it and note the passage of time."

"Yes, yes, the passage of time." The girl turned away for a moment, almost overcome.

"I'll take it."

Very soberly Isabel made the change and wrapped the purchase for her father, who slipped it into his pocket, and gazed about vaguely again. "I suppose I might get something for your mother," he said. He began strolling in a leisurely way about the room.

As soon as he had left the table, Isabel burst into suppressed giggles. "Oh, Rod, come here! It's too funny," she called in a choked voice. "It's too delicious. Ha-ha-ha!" Her shoulders were shaking in her attempt to control her laughter.

"What is it, Isabel?" Rodney was all agog for the joke.

"Oh, it's too lovely! What do you think? I brought in an old carved Swiss watch-rack that some

one in the family had given father a long time ago, and that he never thought of using. And, oh, Rod, he came in and bought it for himself, and never knew the difference!"

"Oh, say! that's too much! He didn't, really?" Rodney was grinning delightedly.

"Really." Isabel was all giggles again.

They had a good laugh together. Then Isabel gave a little shriek. "Ah, I have a wonderful idea. I brought a majolica plate that mother wanted to get rid of. It's on Meta's table. I looked a few minutes ago, and it wasn't sold. Wouldn't it be fun to make father get it and take it home to mother?"

"That would be rich," agreed Rodney hilariously. "Do you suppose you can do it?"

"I'll try. You go and tell Meta, and I'll lure him on." Rodney hastened over to Meta's table, and Isabel approached her father with a daughterly smile. "Don't you think it would be nice if you bought from Meta?" she said, squeezing her father's arm. "She's trying to make a record of sales, you know."

"Why, yes; delighted, of course." The professor looked pleased.

"Meta will help you pick out something."

Meta was by this time informed of the conspiracy. "Can I sell you anything, Professor Carleton?" she asked sweetly as the unsuspecting victim neared her table.

"Yes, I think so. If I should see something that Mrs. Carleton would like, I'd take it. I'm not very clever at buying things, I'm sorry to say," he added.

"I'll help you. There are ever so many things here that might please her. She's fond of china, isn't she?"

"Yes, I believe so. I believe I have heard her say she is."

"Well, let's see. There's that luster pitcher — and that Chelsea cream-jug, and that old blue-and-white sugar bowl. Those are all nice. Oh!" (as if with a sudden inspiration) "how about this majolica plate? Don't you think she'd like that?" She held up the plate and gazed at it admiringly.

"It's very striking." The professor stared at it dubiously through his horn-rimmed glasses. "Awfully green, isn't it? Do you think she'd like anything so green?"

"Why, I should think she would. It's a fine plate. And now, of course, since the war, there is very little importing of fine china." Meta looked very knowing, and very much the young woman of the world in her modish rose-colored dress.

Professor Carleton hesitated, regarding the brilliant gloss of the plate with some suspicion. "M-m, well, I think I'll take it," he said at last; "that is, if you feel sure Mrs. Carleton will like it."

Meta assumed a delicately injured air. "How could she help liking a fine piece of china such as this is?" she queried earnestly. "But of *course,* if you don't *think* that I —"

"Oh, no offense, no offense," exclaimed the professor hastily. "I defer to your judgment entirely."

"That's very kind of you." Meta's mien was almost lofty. "I am sure Mrs. Carleton will be surprised,"— she paused while she wrapped the plate;

" and pleased," she supplemented, with a twitch of the lips,—" at least I hope so. It isn't very expensive, either," she went on. " There! now that's off your mind."

" Thank you for your assistance," beamed the professor as he departed with the plate held carefully against his coat, very much after the manner of Billy-Boy.

Isabel, who had been lurking in the background, ran up and whispered to Meta, " The poor dear innocent! How much did you 'soak him,' as Rod says? "

" Only a dollar and a quarter," returned Meta, with a red face. " I couldn't bear to rob him. As it is, I shall never dare to look him in the face again! "

" Oh, he'll forgive you. He loves a joke." Isabel was reassuring.

" My conscience hurts. You and Rod will have to stand by me."

" You won't need any support."

Other purchasers, long neglected, were picking over the articles left on the tables, and the girls went back to their places.

In a few minutes, Monsieur and Madame D'Albert came to buy from Isabel. They were dear friends of hers, and she was devoted to their little French baby. " What do you think, mademoiselle? " said Madame D'Albert, an attractive young woman with a clear olive skin and black hair,— " what do you think? The grandmother of *le petit Louis* sent some money to buy him a little present. And we thought it would be right if we could pur-

chase something here, so that the money could go to some *petit Louis* in Belgium."

"That's very beautiful, Madame," said Isabel, smiling across the table. "I wonder if I have anything that would be nice enough. Things have been picked over so much, and there weren't very many for children, to begin with. But yes, I forgot this!" She pointed to a shallow silver porringer, with flat ears projecting at the sides. "It costs a good deal — but it's a darling, and so is *le petit Louis!*"

"It is the very thing," announced Monsieur D'Albert solemnly. "The grandmother would be well pleased. But is it not too costly for our means?" He rolled his soft brown eyes inquiringly at Isabel.

"We must have it," Madame was saying. "He will soon be big enough to sit up and eat from it, and Monsieur can take a photograph and send it to *la petite grand'mere.*" She took the porringer up in eager hands.

Isabel had furtively removed the price-mark. But after all the grandmother's money and Mrs. Goldthwaite's price were not irreconcilable, and the young father flutteringly laid down the bills, while Madame ran her fingers lovingly around the smooth circle of the dish.

When Monsieur had stowed the porringer safely away in his rain-coat pocket, Madame stopped to speak to Isabel. "You must come to see us soon. We miss you when you stay away."

"I'm coming in a day or two." Isabel felt a pang of self-reproach. "I love to go. But Winger Park seems so far away when one is busy!"

"I am afraid you lead the life of the butterfly, Mademoiselle Isabel."

"Oh, no! far from it. It seems sometimes more like the life of the snail — I'm so slow about doing all the things I want to do."

"I always think of you as some creature that flies through the air — one of those bright little finches, all gay colors and sweet voice."

Isabel gave the lady a grateful look. "Thank you, dear Madame," she murmured. "You always say the perfect thing." So the friends parted in mutual satisfaction.

The hour was now growing late. The dusk had settled down, misty and blue; and through the wide windows of the shop the arc lights in the streets glittered orange-red in the fog. The huge white bulk of the Capitol Building shone out in the twilight, its pillars ascending into obscurity.

"Time to go home, I think," said Isabel, yawning. Customers had become few and hurried. Rodney and George Burnham had said good-by and gone, some time since.

"Yes, I think we may as well close," said Mrs. Goldthwaite. "I don't believe it's worth while to keep open any longer. We have certainly had a good sale, considering the weather."

"It's been pretty strenuous," commented Isabel. "And I'm so hungry it's hardly safe for any one to come near me. I hope Olga will have dinner on time."

"I'm so glad I'm going home with you," said Meta, whose vitality seemed unimpaired after the really exhausting activities of the day.

"So'm I — and Miss Meade, too."

Miss Meade had put on her wraps, and now stood ready while the others put on theirs. Mrs. Goldthwaite stayed to lock up and turn things over to the janitor.

The three young women hurried home in the moist April dusk, tired but jubilant with the results of their toil. "A lot of Belgian babies will grow fat on what we've garnered in," said Miss Meade, stepping cautiously between the puddles.

"I hope so, poor little souls," returned Isabel from under her dripping umbrella. "I sometimes think we all ought to live on corn-meal mush and wear our oldest clothes until every bit of that terrible suffering is relieved."

"It's so hard to realize it when it's so far away," sighed Meta, as hundreds of other people have said and sighed.

Stamping, and shaking the rain from their clothes, the three friends rushed up the Carleton steps, and soon, relieved of wraps and umbrellas, hastened into the sitting-room, where a bright fire was burning on the hearth.

"Oh, isn't this heavenly!" They spoke in a chorus as they looked about the comfortable room. On the table a low lamp with a yellow silk shade diffused a mellow light. Daffodils stood in glass jars upon the mantel, and a pot of delicate pink azaleas glowed on a wicker hour-glass stool in the bow window.

"Fire and flowers give a charm that nothing else can," exulted Olivia Meade, taking the wing-chair which Isabel pulled out for her.

"I love 'em," said Isabel. "Oh, here's Fanny. She's both."

Fanny, tall for her fifteen years, came in rather primly and shook hands with the guests. She had exchanged her Peter Thompson school suit for a buff linen with a black velvet tie, very becoming to her girlish face and figure.

Mrs. Carleton came in, a moment later, welcoming the guests with her usual gracious hospitality. "Did you have a good day, in spite of the rain?" she asked.

"We did wonders," Miss Meade replied, as she drew her knitting from a gay silk bag. "We were just crowing over the feast that the babies are going to have."

"My heart bleeds for the women and children in these fearful times," said Mrs. Carleton from her seat on the sofa. "Sometimes I can't sleep for thinking about them."

"Yes; but great things for women will come out of this war, I believe," answered Olivia, over the gray sock which she was knitting. "They are learning to take their real place in the world."

"And they'll have to have some recognition for it, too," cried Meta fiercely. "They can't go on forever, being treated as if they had no intelligence!" Her eyes snapped as she spoke.

"If they can take men's places, they can think as well as men about what the laws ought to be, and who ought to be elected," said Olivia calmly; and then she stopped to count a row of stitches.

"Nobody can stop them," remarked Mrs. Carleton. "When the world gets ready for a change

of policy and action, nothing can keep it from coming. Conservative people may hold back and kick and scream all they like, but the great event comes on relentlessly."

"It's that way with suffrage, isn't it, mother?" said Fanny. "What's the use of getting excited and ranting and calling names, when it's bound to come anyway?"

"It's rather thrilling to call names and rant," spoke up Isabel, who had been too tired to talk. "Why not do it while one has the chance?"

"Well, I want my say," cried Meta, more savagely than before. "I want to shout out what I think about it. The way women have been kept down is something unbelievable — something —"

"Good evening, ladies," said a voice from the door. Professor Carleton came in from the hall. In his hand he carried a paper parcel.

"Oh!" Isabel touched Meta on the arm. "The plate!" she whispered.

"I intended getting home earlier," explained the professor; "but Lenner insisted on my going into the Club to meet a friend of his. I bought a little gift for you at the rummage-sale," he added as he turned to Mrs. Carleton. The three conspirators were watching the scene with eager eyes.

Mrs. Carleton took the parcel, a pleased expression glowing in her face. "That was very sweet of you," she said, giving her husband's hand a caressing touch. Then she threw him a startled look, as the greenness of the plate became visible through its inner wrapping of tissue paper. At last the plate came out in all its unabashed brilliancy of green.

Mrs. Carleton held it at arm's length and gazed wildly around. She uttered a startled cry. "Why, Arthur, where *did* you get this?" Her face was so funny that the others jumped in their chairs with delight.

"Why, I told you — at the Belgian Relief," answered the professor with a bewildered glance around the room.

Mrs. Carleton began to laugh hysterically, and the others joined in, with merry shouts. "Oh, Arthur, Arthur! It's the plate that Isabel took from here — one I wanted to get rid of," she gasped. "Isabel *took* it to the sale!"

"Not really?" The professor's face was rueful. "The very same?" He laughed, too, in rather a sorry way. "But why did you let me —?" He turned to Isabel, but her mischievously twinkling eyes gave the conspiracy away. "I see now. You 'put up a job' on your poor old father. And you were in it, too!" He turned in mock severity to Meta, who was hopping up and down with hilarity.

"Father, that's one on you," Isabel exclaimed breathlessly, after a long ripple of laughter. "Now, show mother the watch-rack that you bought at the sale."

Hesitatingly Professor Carleton put his hand into his coat pocket, and pulled out the parcel, and gave it to Mrs. Carleton to undo. She tore off the wrappings and revealed the carved box, with its white edelweiss surrounded by leaves and buds.

"Is it the same one I used to have?" asked the professor humbly, as he looked appealingly at his wife. "Don't tell me it is!"

"The identical object," laughed Mrs. Carleton, while the others shrieked again at the victim's comical grimace. "It's been on the shelf in the hall closet for three or four years. Oh, Arthur, Arthur! you're hopeless!"

"Well, Laura, I see that you and I are fated to keep our treasures," sighed the professor, as he went to put the wrapping papers into the fire. "Nothing can wrest them from us. But I don't suppose I'll hear the last of this escapade while I dwell on this terrestrial sphere." He gazed reproachfully at Isabel and Fanny.

"Not if we can help it, Popsey," Fanny assured him. "It's too delicious a joke to forget. We'll remind you of it — don't worry."

"Dinner is served," said Olga, coming quietly to the door.

"Wild horses couldn't keep me back," cried Isabel, jumping up eagerly. "I feel like a starving Belgian myself."

"I'll put the green plate at your place, father," said Fanny, as they all trooped out for dinner.

CHAPTER III

AFFAIRS DOMESTIC

DURING the swiftly flitting months of the winter, Isabel had been studying hard at college. She had settled into the routine of work, to which, in the first few weeks, it had seemed that she could never become adjusted.

"I'm getting so that I can lift the burden of the day's tasks without groaning," she said lightly to Fanny one morning at breakfast, which they were eating together, the others having finished before them.

"You don't take it half so hard as you did," admitted Fanny, putting two heaping spoonfuls of sugar into her coffee.

"So much of the studying has to be done just by reading things in the library," Isabel went on. "It's not so dreadfully hard to sit and read some interesting book and take notes on it."

"But if the book isn't interesting, it must be a bore," commented Fanny. "This grape-fruit is dreadfully sour."

"Have another half-pound of sugar," said Isabel, handing Fanny the sugar-bowl. "Yes, but most of the books are all right," she continued. "You can always remember that they were real people who did the things that history is made up of. If you have any imagination at all, you can see the people

taking part in the doings that you have to know about — Queen Elizabeth, and Leicester, and the Charleses, and William Pitt, and the rest. You can sort of conjure them up again, and it seems like a moving-picture."

"You can't do that with geometry," grumbled Fanny. "I defy anybody to make much of a movie out of that." Fanny made no secret of the fact that she despised mathematics.

"I'll confess it is a little hard to imagine a very thrilling drama out of parallelopipeds and pentagons. I believe I *should* prefer Mary Pickford." Isabel smiled over her breakfast food.

"If I scratch through in geometry this year," said Fanny vehemently, "you'll never catch me mixing up with anything that looks like a figure again. I'll run a mile if I see one."

"One doesn't need much mathematics in this world," conceded Isabel. "I've never needed to do anything but subtract one sum of dollars-and-cents from another. And I don't really need that, for I know how much I have, and then I know when it's all gone."

"One doesn't have to more than count up to ten," mourned Fanny. "And all this yow-yowing about right angles and hypothenuses seems such a waste of valuable time. Why, I could learn to play a hundred pieces while I'm floundering through one old geometry-book."

"Your language is expressive if not elegant," returned Isabel, breaking a piece of toast. "But, you know, grown-up people wouldn't think you were getting anything out of your school if you weren't

suffering a little. They set great store by the suffering. You ought to hear 'em. I stopped at the door of one of the rooms in the Library building, where the Teachers' Association was having a meeting, and I heard one man say —"

"What'd he look like?" asked Fanny.

"Oh, he had a low collar and a bulging forehead; he looked well enough. He said, 'H-h-m, fellow-teachers, we must never forget the general educational value of — h-h-m — stringent application to a — h-h-m — severe mathematical and scientific curriculum!'" Isabel coughed pompously between the words.

"I'm glad he doesn't teach me," said Fanny, beginning on her cream-of-wheat. "They don't all want you to suffer; but how can you help it, when you have to spend years on a lot of stuff that you don't like? If Mr. Stacy wasn't just as patient with me as forty Jobs, I think I'd tear my geometry up into little bits and trample on it, some day in class. I'd jump up and down and scream."

"That would be a spectacle. Miss Frances Carleton expelled from the high school for jumping on her geometry and squealing, in class!"

"I'll try to restrain myself. But it's pretty bad."

"You'll soon finish that bugbear."

"If I pass," groaned Fanny.

"Oh, you'll pass. For goodness' sake don't begin to worry about exams till you have to. That way madness lies."

"It seems to me I've seen you get pretty scared, about quiz-time," retorted Fanny. "It hasn't been

so very long since you couldn't eat any lunch, for fussing over a quiz in something-or-other."

"Oh, well, college subjects are so much more difficult than high school studies." Isabel spoke in an unconsciously patronizing tone. "And it makes so much more difference whether you do well or not."

"High school stuff is just as hard in proportion, Miss Top-lofty," returned the younger girl angrily, "and just as important. You needn't think that you college folks are of so much more account in this world than other people. I can remember when you were in the high school — and it's not so very long ago, either — you thought your standings and your running for class-president and your valedictory essay were the most *em-phat-i-cally* important things on earth."

Isabel stared at Fanny, and then her face relaxed into a slow smile. "I am afraid that I shall have to admit that Little Sister is right," she murmured thoughtfully. "I guess I did take myself with awful seriousness. Ugh! that class-president business was horrid. I don't want ever to be reminded of it again. And I was simply scared blue when it came to giving my graduation 'spiel.' Isn't it funny how we forget these things?"

"It ought to make you have a little more sympathy for those who are going through the same experiences," protested Fanny, somewhat mollified by her sister's concessions.

"It ought to, but it doesn't," replied Isabel cheerfully. "Now, a few years from to-day, you'll be patronizing Celia, just as you say I patronize you."

"I never shall," maintained Fanny. "You see if I do."

"We'll see, Fan. I can't believe that our Infant Prodigy is so wonderfully superior to her relatives and friends."

"I think you're mean, Isabel." Fanny hated being called Infant Prodigy.

Olga came in with the bacon and eggs and the girls finished their breakfast almost in silence.

"Thank heaven, this isn't my morning for an eight o'clock," said Isabel, as they got up from the table. "I'll have time to do my room — and yours, too, Fan, if you want to work on your geometry."

"I'd like to have fifteen minutes on it," answered Fanny. "I'd be much obliged if you would straighten my room a little, and make the bed."

"All right. But maybe I can help you with the problem that you didn't get last night."

"Mr. Stacy doesn't like us to get help if we can possibly struggle on without it," said Fanny in her honest way. "I think I'll try it alone."

"Well, go on and peg away, then. I'm sure you can get it," said Isabel encouragingly, as she turned to go upstairs.

While she made the two beds and set the rooms to rights, Isabel thought about the studying which she had done that year. She had worked hard; but, as she had just said to Fanny, things had gone happily after the first weeks of adjustment, and she had done exceedingly well. "But it's really not like the high school," she said to herself. "There's a lot more competition, and one has to do better in order to shine. The valedictorians from hundreds of

schools are there, and you have to ' get up early,' in order to make any showing at all."

She stopped in the task of straightening the books in Fanny's book-case, and was on her knees, thinking deeply, when her mother entered, in her big apron, with an armful of clean clothes.

" What are you dreaming about? " asked Mrs. Carleton, putting the things away in a dresser drawer.

" I was admitting to myself, unwillingly enough," said Isabel, " that I'm probably going to be only one of the ' also ran's ' at the University. I do well enough, you know, but I'm not at all sure that I'll get a Phi Beta Kappa. You don't mind, do you? "

" Mind? Why, no, of course not. Your father and I like you to do well, but we don't want you to work too hard to get honors, nor worry if you don't get them. We want you to have some wholesome pleasure in life, you know."

" I have the greatest respect for the Phi Beta Kappa people — I don't want to belittle them in the least; but I'm not going to pine away if I don't get a chance to join them." Isabel got up and began to walk about thoughtfully.

" You're doing four years' work in three, anyway," said her mother. " That ought to be enough."

" *And* my jewelry work," cried Isabel enthusiastically. " How glad I am that I did study while I was in Europe, so that I was able to make up all that time, and get a chance at the handicraft courses. And of course the Fund has meant a good deal of labor for me, but that's been a joy, too."

"Yes, it's very gratifying," smiled Mrs. Carleton. "I must go down and order the groceries, and help Olga plan lunch and dinner."

"For your pack of hungry wolves! One snap and a lick of their chops, and your whole day's work has disappeared."

"They have to be appeased!"

"I suppose you're afraid that if you don't have roast lamb and salad enough for them, they'll turn and gobble *you.*"

"It wouldn't do to risk it," laughed Mrs. Carleton. "Oh, there's the telephone. Who's calling up now? If it weren't for the telephone, one might get some work done."

"I don't know about that," answered Isabel. "If people didn't telephone, they'd do their errands in person, and that would be worse."

"Which reminds me of what some wise person has said,—'Progress is exchanging one nuisance for another.' Yes, Olga, I'm coming."

Mrs. Carleton ran hastily downstairs, and Isabel went to dress for her classes. While she was hooking her gown, she heard Fanny calling from the foot of the stairs, "Hi, Izzy! I got it."

"I knew you would," shouted Isabel in reply.

"It was easy as pie, after I saw how," added Fanny, and the front door slammed behind her.

Isabel sat down to copy a theme before she went to class. The sounds of household activity came to her faintly from below,— the rattling of dishes, the *burr* of the carpet-sweeper, the gruff voice of the ice-man, who was late and didn't care.

"I wonder whether I ought to cut out this flowery

phrase?" Isabel pondered. "It says just what I mean, but it may be rather gushy." Her instructor abhorred flowery phrases, and she had an outspoken fear of his caustic tongue. "He'd probably stab me with an epigram," she mumbled, running her pen through the offending group of words on the first draught of the theme. She hurried to finish her copying; glanced at the clock, bundled her books and papers together; pinned on her hat, and hastened downstairs, and out into the warm April sunshine.

In the upper hall of the Home Arts building, she met Miss Phelps, her handicraft teacher, a quiet, bright-eyed young woman, with delicate, skillful hands. "I wanted to tell you, Miss Carleton," said Miss Phelps, looking pleased, "that some people were in here to see our permanent exhibit, late yesterday afternoon, and a woman liked that ring that you made, and wanted to know whether you would sell it. She said it was exactly what her young daughter would like."

"Of course I would," answered Isabel quickly. "I'd be glad to." She was more pleased, herself, than she cared to show. "That's what I expect to do with my work, eventually — why not now?"

"I thought you would sell it," Miss Phelps went on. "It's always well to sell things when you get a chance, even if you haven't planned to. One sale leads to another, you know."

"Yes; and I do so want to be independent," sighed the girl.

"You will be," said Miss Phelps in a friendly tone. "I prophesy that for you."

"I think women ought to be self-supporting as

much as they possibly can," Isabel said, thinking aloud, "and I've never really earned a cent yet, except once when I did a little tutoring."

"Now's your chance," said Miss Phelps with a smile. "I took the woman's address and I'm to let her know."

"I hope the ring will give her daughter as much pleasure as my pearl and coral one did me when I first had it," said Isabel, as she held up her finger to show the ring which her father had brought her from Chicago, two years before. "I wanted a chrysoprase ring that I saw down at Miss Titus's, and I thought my life was blighted because I couldn't have it. Sometime I'm going to make one exactly like the one that slipped away from me then."

"Better wait till you've had a little more experience," said Miss Phelps. "That turquoise pendant that you're making is about all you can manage now, don't you think?"

"I surely do. Thank you for helping me to sell the ring."

"Don't mention it. I'll let you know as soon as I hear."

All day Isabel rejoiced in the prospect of beginning to be a worker in the world, of being independent,— a state of which she had dreamed a good deal in times of financial pressure. She did not say anything at home. "I think it's better to keep still about things until they have developed a little," she said to herself.

Two days afterward, Miss Phelps gave her the check for the ring, which was to be sent by regis-

tered mail. Isabel stared at the slip of paper, and then put it carefully away in her purse. It seemed almost sacred to her, a kind of symbol of happy work and fair return which were to be hers in the future. She hastened to do up the ring and take it to the Post Office before she went home after her classes were over.

When she got home, she called Fanny aside and showed her the check. "You now behold a wage-earner in the great commercial world," she said solemnly.

"How on earth did you get it?" cried Fanny. "Is it a real one?" she asked incredulously. "Can you get money for it?"

"You'll see. Father will cash it for me, and turn it in at the State Bank."

"Well, but how did you get it?"

"Guess."

"Oh, I can't guess. Did you tutor some one?"

"No."

"Did you give a lecture to the Woman's Club on 'What I Saw in Europe'?"

"Now, Fan, don't be satirical. I sold that ring that I made,— the one that was in the permanent exhibit in the Crafts Room." Isabel spoke with pardonable triumph to her skeptical sister.

"Honest? And got all that for it!"

"That isn't so very much. The materials cost quite a little. But I feel rich, I might as well confess. This will buy a lot of stuff to make up into silver things. It's so nice to have earned it myself." Isabel folded the check with satisfaction.

"I should think it is!" commented Fanny generously. "I'm awfully glad you could do it, Goldilocks."

"It gives me a new start in life," said Isabel. "I feel as if I could do wonders."

"I don't doubt that you can," sighed Fanny. "All I can do is see-saw away on the violin a little, and folks always expect you to do that for nothing, no matter how much it costs you to learn."

"You'll probably be getting fabulous sums for it some day," said Isabel comfortingly. "And I'll sit in the cheapest seat in the gallery, in my old patched clothes, and see you come out all decked up in velvet and jools that have been presented to you by the crowned heads of Europe — if there are any heads left when this war is over — and you'll draw your bow across the strings with one long low wailing exquisite cadence —"

"Oh, hush up, Isabel," interrupted Fanny, grinning in spite of herself. "Come on, and let's tell the family of your stroke of fortune."

"I hope they won't think me a mercenary wretch, selling my art for a few florins," said Isabel.

"Never fear. They'll be glad to look forward to your keeping 'em out of the poor-house."

"It'll be a long time before I can promise to do that."

The family received the news with satisfying wonder and delight. "What are you going to do with so much money?" asked Professor Carleton teasingly, as he took out his wallet, preparatory to cashing the check.

"I'm going to buy more materials with it."

"Ah, I see. It's like the ancient story of the boy whose mother paid him a penny for each dose of castor-oil that he took."

"Well, what about it, daddy?"

"Some one asked him what he did with so much money, and he said, 'Oh, mother uses it to buy more castor-oil!'"

"That's my state exactly," chuckled Isabel as she reached for the crisp bills which her father handed to her. "And I'm going to make this buy just as much castor-oil as it possibly can!"

She went away beaming happily over the reward of honest effort and earnest toil.

In the course of the same week in which the episode of the check occurred, a domestic incident was working itself out.

The reader may remember Mr. Christian Evestad, who was a guest at Olga's anniversary party in the fall. The Carletons had by spring become accustomed to seeing the worthy Christian, in his neat readymade clothes, sitting in the kitchen, lingering on the back porch, or walking soberly away at a dignified hour, after taking Olga to the moving-pictures and bringing her home again.

"Olga is doomed, that's easy to be seen," said Isabel one evening after dinner. "There's a different light in her eye; she looks as if she had a happy secret."

"She's frizzing her hair, too," remarked Fanny, who was looking at the pictures in a new magazine. "And she bought a pair of shoes with high heels. I call those both very bad signs."

"That isn't the worst," sighed Mrs. Carleton, over her knitting. "She's been hemming sheets in her room, and putting cross-stitched initials on towels."

"Then we're done for," groaned Isabel. "Now, Fanny, here, is responsible for all this. She started this match-making last fall at Olga's party. I should think you'd be conscience-stricken, now, Miss Fan, when you see how you've skinned your family out of a perfectly good Swedish maid."

"I never did," protested Fanny, getting red, and shutting the magazine with a jerk. "He'd taken Olga to the movies two or three times before that. And anyway," she went on, "I'm glad that Olga is going to have a home of her own, and not have to work in somebody's kitchen all her life."

"She'll probably have to work in her own kitchen," Isabel remarked drily.

"That's different. And besides, the honest Christian may get to be a contractor, or whatever it's called, and make money. Olga may lead society in Jefferson yet. Who knows?"

"Nothing surprises me," said Mrs. Carleton with another sigh. "America is a free country. What I'm thinking of is, how I'm going to get another maid."

"Wait till the blow falls," advised Isabel practically. "Men are fickle creatures. Maybe he'll find some one else."

"No danger, now that he's sampled Olga's cooking," warned Fanny, going back to her magazine.

The blow fell the very next day, as if talking about it had brought it on.

Mrs. Carleton had sat down in her own room to re-sew the buttons and belts on some "bought" aprons for Celia, and Isabel was loitering on the couch before going to her three o'clock class. Olga tapped at the open door, and stood hesitating on the threshold. There were, indeed, frizzes on her smooth white forehead; and there was, indeed, a happy light in her kind blue eyes. She looked very neat and capable and earnest, in her blue gingham house-dress, with white collar and elbow-cuffs.

"What is it, Olga?" asked Mrs. Carleton apprehensively.

"Missis Carleton — I — I haf soomthing to tell you — soomthings —" Olga had learned to speak very well, but in her nervousness she dropped into the broad accent of her earlier years in America. She twisted her fingers into the plaits of her skirt.

Mrs. Carleton let her sewing fall into her lap. "I know, Olga," she said helpfully, "you're going to be married to Mr. Evestad."

Olga gave a gulp of relief. "Yes, that's it. That's what I wanted to say."

"We saw it coming, Olga," said Isabel; and the maid turned to the younger girl with a grateful if embarrassed smile.

"I'm ever so sorry you're leaving us," said Mrs. Carleton, trying not to show how really sorry she was. "You've been a wonderful help. But we want you to be happy."

"He's a nice kind man, we're sure," put in Isabel.

"Yes, Miss, he is good. I think I be happy."

"When do you expect to be married?" asked Mrs. Carleton, as if desirous of knowing the worst.

"In two — t'ree weeks, Missis Carleton."

"So soon?" The lady looked distressed for a moment. "Well, well, we shall get on somehow, Olga. Go ahead, and make your plans as you choose."

"I'm sorry to go — but — you know —" Olga looked at Isabel for encouragement.

"Yes, we know, Olga," laughed the girl. "We wouldn't put a straw in your way."

"Thank you, Miss Isabel."

"I'll talk it over with you in a day or two," said Mrs. Carleton. "We want you to have things just as you'd like them."

"Thank you, Missis Carleton." Olga turned away with joy and relief upon her honest face.

"She's glad to get it over," Isabel remarked sympathetically.

Mrs. Carleton lifted her sewing in an absent way, and began taking stitches in a sash. "It doesn't seem as if I could keep house without Olga," she said dejectedly. "She's slow, but she's so faithful and neat, and she knows just how I like to have things done." There was unusual dismay in the housewife's eyes, and she worked at the pink gingham pinafore. "Well, the Lord will have to provide," she added resignedly.

"We'll have to do something for her, shan't we, mother?" Isabel looked at the clock, and rose to go.

"Yes. But I suppose she will want the wedding at her sister's. If it were not for that, we could make a wedding for her here. But we can give her a wedding dress, if she hasn't already planned one.

Don't you think a nice flounced embroidery gown would be right?"

"I should think so. And a veil. They all want a veil."

"Yes — of pretty, fine white net. It will be becoming to Olga, with her lovely complexion and her nice hair."

The next day, Mrs. Stuart, Mrs. Carleton's mother, came in from Dalton for a day's shopping. She listened to the story of Olga's romance, and the bereaved housekeeper's lamentations. "What am I going to do, mother?" Mrs. Carleton said at last.

Mrs. Stuart, a bright old woman, with white hair and very keen dark eyes, smiled at her daughter's distress. "Why, I know what you can do, for a while, at least," she said reassuringly. "I'll lend you Melissy."

"Oh, mother! can you spare her?" Mrs. Carleton looked rather nonplussed. She was not sure whether she wanted Melissy or not.

"Yes, I can spare her. She'd love to come to the city and see things. She has a pathetically eager soul. I know a woman who will come and help me while Melissy is with you."

"That will be fine," said Mrs. Carleton, looking relieved. "Can Melissy do the work here, do you think?"

"She will run the family for you, if you like," answered Mrs. Stuart, with her eyes twinkling. "And she'll afford you diversion, if nothing more."

"Yes, she'll do that." The Carletons all knew Melissy, because they had visited many times at Grandfather's stock-farm, just outside of the little

town of Dalton. "Well, I shall look forward to her arrival," said Mrs. Carleton. "I hope we can arrange things so that Melissy can come the same day that Olga goes. And now that's another domestic difficulty straightened out."

CHAPTER IV

THE CANTON FLANNEL APE

THE week slipped quickly away, and brought Saturday, the day of the University Circus. Meta was going with George Burnham, who could get away from the office on Saturday, and of course had no part in the performance. Rodney was one of the troupe. In this gay spring carnival, no hard-working engineering student was too reserved to throw his dignity to the winds and engage in the most hilarious of antics.

Isabel was going with Olivia Meade. As the two young women came out from behind the trees which surrounded the Library, they gave a gasp, for they saw that the balloon ascension was taking place. The big dark globe hung wavering over the lake, and from a trapeze dangled the figure of a man suspended by his hands above the great gulf of air and water.

"Oh-h!" The heart of Isabel gave a leap of horror. She covered her eyes that she might not see the rash creature plunge headlong to his death.

Then Olivia began to laugh. "Look, Miss Carleton," she cried, with a quiver of relief in her own voice. "Don't you see that it's only a dummy?"

Isabel stared at the limp dangling figure. "Why,

of course it is," she said, drawing a long breath. "I'm really all in a tremble. We might have known; but those boys do such dreadfully reckless things sometimes. They've never had a balloon ascension before, since I've been going to the Circuses."

"I don't believe they'd risk their necks to please the populace," remarked Miss Meade. "I'm glad we're a little early, so that we can view the animals and get good seats before the crowd pours in."

The Circus was held in the Armory, a huge red brick building on the bank of the lake, opposite the lower campus. The animal "tent" was an annex to the Armory, where small squads of the freshmen could drill in rainy weather.

In the first cage, which was mounted on a wagon in regulation circus style, was a tall giraffe with a spotted hide, and an odd-looking head waving eagerly above the bars. The hind feet appeared strangely like a pair of men's shoes, though half hidden by the straw.

"He's a perfectly good giraffe," said Isabel speculatively, "but I suspect that I should recognize his voice if I should hear him speak."

They went on, to the cage where a ramping lion with a very lumpy body was pacing back and forth in his narrow room, occasionally roaring a lusty roar and clacking two unnaturally red jaws.

"He looks as if he'd just come out of the story of *The Wizard of Oz,*" commented Olivia. "But I don't see any Tin Woodman."

In another cage, a huge black snake was coiled artistically on a dead tree. The serpent had tiny

red electric lights for eyes, and looked extremely dangerous, in spite of its never moving.

Look out for the Orang-Outang, warned a sign on the outside of the next cage. *He's Fierce.*

" Our old friend and nearest relative, the monkey," laughed Olivia.

They stopped to stare at the gibbering creature who clung to the bars of the cage with both paws, and rattled the bars savagely. He had a big brown body, a trailing tail, and a monkey-faced mask. The orang-outang gave a fiercer fling at the bars, sounded a terrific gurgle and gibber, and then murmured in a low voice, " Hello, Isabel! "

" I never speak to apes," responded the girl with dignity. " Conversing with engineering students is as far as I'll go in that direction."

" Only a peanut from your fair hand! " begged the ape in a piteous tone. An Italian peanut vendor, from whose bearded face peeped two very merry and youthful blue eyes, approached the girls with a well-heaped basket. Isabel bought a small bag of peanuts, and she and Olivia amused themselves by throwing nuts at the ape, who caught them in his agile paws, shelled them, and pushed the meats beneath his mask.

" He seems almost intelligent," vouchsafed Isabel in an awed voice.

" It's the company I'm keeping," rejoined the ape.

Other sightseers were crowding up. Just then Bertram Dodge came along, very handsome and immaculate in a new spring suit. He was a blond young man a good deal in evidence about the University, where he was doing graduate work for a

higher degree. His face lighted up when he saw Olivia and Isabel. "Ah, this is delightful," he exclaimed. "Why can't we all sit together, since we have so opportunely met?" A blare of music sounded from the great hall of the Armory, and the two young women, with Bertram Dodge hurried away to see the rest of the animals, and then to take their places in the "tent,"— with scarcely a backward glance at the unhappy ape. This aboriginal creature, having no need to restrain himself, kicked the bars of his cage spitefully and muttered something that sounded like "confounded upstart." The orang-outang had never liked Bertram Dodge.

Inside the Armory, the trio sat in merry talk, swinging their feet between the narrow plank seats that rose in tiers around the "ring"; Dodge was really diverting, with a cynical style of humor of his own. He and Olivia had gone about a good deal together, during the winter, and set people's tongues to wagging. Isabel had seen very little of him, for she had been busy with her own affairs and friends.

The crowd was coming in very fast now; and the seats rapidly filled with gay college students or more sober members of the faculty. Almost at the time set, the performance began. It is not our purpose to describe minutely every event of that long and amusing program. There were acrobatic "stunts," and bareback riding on very docile white horses, superannuated circus steeds, it was whispered, from the Jingling Brothers' winter quarters in the little town twenty miles "up the line." There was barefoot dancing, which burlesqued the antics of a fa-

mous dancer, somewhat stout, who had appeared in Jefferson a few weeks before; a hulking youth in gauze draperies threw himself into ludicrous poses, and flung a blue chiffon motor-veil fitfully about, greatly to the delight of those who disapproved of Madame Theodora.

Midway in the program the ringmaster with his megaphone announced the appearance of a trained ape, lately from the professional stage in Zululand.

A man in high silk hat and evening clothes came in, leading the brown ape, who cavorted about his master in a winning and affectionate way, which placed him at once on good terms with the spectators. The band struck up a tune, and the ape, seizing his master around the waist, drew him into a fantastic dance, a weird combination of society two-step and the revel of the African jungle. Round and round they spun, with grotesque motions that brought howls of laughter from the benches. Whenever the couple stopped, the loud clapping from the audience compelled another bout. At last the ape, refusing any further exhibition of his skill, bowed long and low, with his paw somewhere in the region of his heart.

Then he did some clever work on the horizontal bar, placed for his use by two lackeys; and later he distinguished himself by swinging his brown bulk from ring to ring, high above the gymnasium floor, with the quick graceful ease of the trained athlete. It was excellent work, which won a round of honest applause quite as hearty as that which the creature's comical capers had received. With tail flapping and slapping, the ape retired from the floor in a series of

handsprings which elicited a final whoop of joy from the young people on the seats.

Isabel, who had been sitting upright in rapt attention during the ape's performance, sank back with a sigh of relief.

"Great stuff!" exclaimed the blond Bertram in his patronizing tone. "Who was it, do you know, Miss Carleton?"

"A friend of mine, Rodney Fox," answered Isabel briefly. She did not want to talk about Rodney to B. Dodge.

"It was a great success," commented Olivia Meade, furtively glancing at the mirror in the interior of her cleverly-stocked handbag. Bertram was likely to be irritated if her hair were ruffled or her collar awry.

Isabel, knowing how much it meant among the engineering brethren to have each fellow's "bag of tricks" well performed and enthusiastically received, was rejoicing over Rodney's success in the odd part which had been assigned him. The rest of the program, good as it was, did not have quite the zest which the first numbers, full of expectancy for her, had possessed.

After the performance was over, and when those seated on the upper benches had climbed perilously down to the solid floor, Rodney appeared suddenly at Isabel's elbow, still in his costume of canton flannel. He shook hands, and then slipped off his monkey-faced mask.

"Oh, Rod, how you look!" exclaimed Isabel. "You're a weird sight." He certainly was all of that, as he stood with his face held carelessly in his

hand, and his tail slung over his arm. He showed a very hot red countenance of his own, which he mopped vigorously with a white handkerchief.

"That mask is awful," he remarked, drawing a long breath. "I thought I'd smother in it. But I had to appear in the animal tent, until the end of things, for the entertainment of those unlucky wretches who couldn't get seats inside. Well, I think I've done my bit to-day."

"I should say you had," scolded Isabel. "Far more than you needed to."

Olivia and Dodge had sauntered away in the direction of the refreshment tent. "Come on and have something with me," suggested Rodney. "Will you do me the honor?"

"Yes, if you aren't afraid that your master will come and recapture you," laughed the girl. "You make me think of the nursery rhyme:

> "*A* was an artful old ape,
> Who tied up his head with a crape,
> And pretended he cried
> When his master had died,—
> This artful, deceitful old ape."

"Inasmuch as my master has dashed away with the girl he's engaged to, I don't think I need to mourn him long," said Rodney. "Let's go, before the tables are all taken."

They went into the refreshment room, and sat down at a small table. A little way off, the lumpy lion, with his head pushed back on his shoulders, was drinking lemonade thirstily in company with an embarrassed looking girl in a dainty gray silk frock.

Rodney took up the list of refreshments. "I don't suppose they have any bread-fruit or cocoanuts on this inadequate bill-of-fare," he grumbled. "What is a poor hungry ape to eat?"

"Can't you find anything that suits your monkeyship?"

"I suppose that we'll have to satisfy our hunger on poor human junk like ice cream and chocolate cake. Does that please your ladyship?"

"Immensely. But don't let me see you trying to ape your betters."

A giggling girl-waiter came and took their orders, and they were soon devouring their ice cream and cake with healthy appetites.

"You did that ring-stuff wonderfully," said Isabel with appreciation. "I was afraid the crowd wouldn't understand how really good it was, when you were in such a crazy costume; but they did."

"I'm glad you liked it," rejoined the young man. "I worked hard at it. You'll soon see me swinging from tree to tree down the jungle of Langdon Street."

"I expect anything now," answered Isabel, looking at some one she knew, across the room.

With a wicked impulse, Rodney slipped his mask on, and glared at Isabel over the little table. "Mercy, Rod! You're too awful for words." Isabel shrank back in her chair. "You take my appetite away."

"Oh, I'm sorry, lady." Rodney took off the mask and hung it on the chair by means of the elastic cord at the back. "I fear I've jarred your sensibilities more than I should have done."

"I don't want to remember you over Sunday like this," laughed Isabel nervously.

"I'll come over in civilized garb to-night."

"Do, for goodness' sake. Come to dinner."

"All right. I'll be delighted."

That evening, just before dinner, Rodney arrived, extremely correct and elegant in his evening clothes, looking very much the fastidious young college man. He had seldom been so ceremonious when he came to dinner at the Carletons'. Isabel, whom instinct had warned, appeared in her best pink satin evening gown, with her hair done high, so that she looked very much the young lady.

"Good evening, Bimi," said Isabel as she came into the sitting-room to greet Rodney. "Do you remember that horrible story of Kipling's about the ape named Bimi? I've been thinking about it ever since I saw you last."

"Well, stop thinking about it now. I'm Bimi no longer."

"You don't look like him. It certainly was a descent of man for you to take such a part. Don't ever be an ape again. I like you better as just plain Rod."

"With my thin veneer of civilization? I'll try henceforth to be as un-ape-like as possible, considering my early ancestry. I'm sorry you don't approve me. I thought I'd make a hit in a Darwinian rôle."

"You may be all right in a Darwinian rôle, whatever that is, but in brown canton flannel, you're unspeakable."

"Never again," promised Rodney, grinning. "My monkey days are over."

The entrance of Mrs. Carleton brought him to his feet with the most courteous of civilized behavior, and at dinner his manners were irreproachable.

After dinner, Fanny played the piano, and they all stood round and sang rollicking vociferous college songs, in which neither Professor nor Mrs. Carleton disdained to join; then Meta Houston and George Burnham came in; and they took up the rugs and danced gayly for an hour. They had a happy home evening, and no monkeys dared to enter.

After the guests had gone, Isabel and Fanny went upstairs to Isabel's room. It was not late, and the older girl sat down on the edge of the bed, to finish a gray scarf which she was knitting. "I do want to get this done before Sunday," she said, with her fingers flying. "This is the last I'm going to do until after Commencement."

Fanny sat down on the shirt-waist box and began to unlace her shoes. "The Sigma Nus are having a party to-night," she said cheerfully, "and I suppose we'll have to hear the music squawking till twelve o'clock."

"Well, their violins won't be the first we have heard," said Isabel, who was, at times, secretly irritated by Fanny's practicing. Fanny gave her a sharp glance, and Isabel hurried to change the subject. "It's a real relief not to have been in a sorority this year," she went on, following the line of thought she had been pursuing when she came upstairs. "It sounds wicked to say so, but I've enjoyed the privileges both of being in and being out."

"Yes, you've been invited to the stunts, and yet

you've been free to roam at large, and mix with the ordinary mortals who make up the biggest part of the University," answered Fanny wisely.

"It's been very nice," said Isabel. It was understood that she should join the Gamma Deltas as soon as a year's residence at the University permitted her to do so.

"The Gamma Deltas are a pretty fair sort, aren't they?" Fanny took off her shoe in a leisurely way and laid it aside. "They have a good time, I know; but do they ever do any studying?"

"They study very *hard,*" responded Isabel with dignity. "They're at it religiously every night — except Friday and Saturday and Sunday, of course."

"And Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday, I suppose," giggled Fanny. "Those girls'll get brain fever if they don't look out."

"Honestly, Fan, they do study." Isabel was nettled at Fanny's irreverent remarks on the Gamma Deltas. "They get wonderful marks. Professor Mitchell was telling me the other day that he'd rather have them in his classes than any other group of sorority girls." She paused in her knitting while she looked triumphantly at her sister.

Fanny laid the second shoe beside the other. "But did he say he'd rather have them in his classes than any other girls on earth?" she asked gravely.

"Oh, well, you can't expect sweeping statements of that kind," sniffed the older girl. "Never mind, Miss Fan, if you don't approve the G. D.'s, you needn't expect me to drag you in when you get to college." Isabel was knitting very fast, and her needles clicked peevishly.

"You aren't in, yourself, yet," retorted Fanny calmly.

Isabel flushed and looked uncomfortable. It was not considered very good taste to boast about a sorority until you were safely in.

"And as for being dragged in," Fanny went on, "if I can't go in on some merit of my own, I guess I'd rather stay out. I get along very well as it is."

"As for our merits," replied Isabel drily, "we professors' daughters never know whether we're invited into a sorority for our own sweet sakes, or for the influence which we can exert over our fathers. A professor's favor counts for a good deal when it comes to voting for honors or electing Phi Bet's."

"The more professors' daughters there are in a 'frat,' the better, then?" queried Fanny thoughtfully, curling her toes in her stocking.

"I suppose so."

"Then I needn't worry, as long as father holds down his job."

"Retains his position, you mean, I dare say." Isabel looked up disapprovingly.

"Call it what you like. Probably there'll be some one to drag me in when the time comes. And as I said, I don't know that I'm wild to get in, anyway. I'd hate to get so that I thought I was a lot better than somebody else, whose father happened to be a bricklayer, or a country preacher."

"If one is going to be a snob, she'll be one, whether she's in a sorority or not," answered Isabel.

"Maybe. But I'd hate to be one for any reason."

"You never will, Fan. You're too honest. I'll

say that for you. You're a real American democrat of the backwoods type. You might be a sister to Daniel Boone."

"I'm glad you think so." Fanny reached, yawning, for her shoes.

"I don't believe you'd care whether you were associating with a Cabinet minister's wife or the junk man's daughter," Isabel continued.

"Why should I?" said Fanny sturdily.

"Why, indeed? These discussions on political economy are too much for me. Do you know where there's a tape measure?" Isabel was straightening out the scarf on the bed. "I believe I've got this long enough."

"I suppose there's one in mother's work basket. You mean, you want me to go and get it, don't you?"

"Oh, would you, Sister Dear?"

"I would if you asked, and didn't hint."

"Hinting is so much better than asking."

"I don't find it so."

"I wonder if I pulled out a stitch then?" Isabel hurriedly began counting stitches. "Fifty-one, fifty-two," she was saying when Fanny came back with the tape measure. "Oh, it's all right." She took the yellow ribbon that her sister held out to her at arm's length. "Thanks, pretty creature. I'll give you a thousand dollars — when I make my fortune."

Fanny picked up her shoes again. "I'll need a thousand dollars by *that time,*" she remarked,— "to buy myself a wig and a wheel-chair."

Isabel was intently measuring the scarf. "Oh, well," she answered airily, "if you're going to be so

ungrateful, I'll give it to the Old Ladies' Home."

"Then I'll get the benefit of it, just the same," returned Fanny with an ostentatious yawn, as she turned away to go to her own room.

"Fanny's a queer little duck," said Isabel contritely to herself, when Fanny had gone. "She's as honest and staunch as the day is long, but she puts on such a provoking bluster that it's hard to see her real self. And she goads me on to saying things that otherwise I'd never dream of saying. I get positively horrid. Oh, dear," she sighed, as she started to "finish off" the scarf, "I know Fanny has a lot of fine possibilities in her, and I ought to try to bring them out. Being a sister does give one such a short perspective, and makes one so hopelessly frank."

Isabel had an opportunity of seeing her sister from a somewhat different angle a day or two later. There was to be an entertainment at Mrs. Hylas's, for the *Paquet du Soldat,* a society which furnished comfort-kits to French soldiers. Fanny was to play. The audience, though not especially large, was to be made up of University people, and members of various musical organizations in town: it would undoubtedly be critical, whether it wished to or not.

After dinner that evening, Mrs. Carleton said to Isabel, "I declare, I'm as nervous as if I were going to play, myself. And anyway, I have to attend to Celia. Will you help Fanny dress?"

"Why, of course, mother," said Isabel. "I'm glad I put on my dress before dinner, so I don't have much to do."

She went up to Fanny's room, and tapped at the half-open door. "Come in," called Fanny in a troubled voice. Isabel went in. Fanny's room had a distinctiveness about it which was quite different from that of Isabel's girlish room. Fanny's was rather stern in its appearance, with very few ornaments. It had a cool reserved air, as if the owner considered mere decoration somewhat beneath her. The chief place on the wall was given to a finely framed print of Terborch's *The Concert,*— a gift which had taxed the combined resources of the family at the previous Christmas.

"I've come to help you, Angel Child," said Isabel as she entered.

Fanny, in her pink kimono, was braiding her hair before the mirror. She turned two very bright eyes toward Isabel. Her unsteady hands slipped down from the dark strands of hair. "My fingers are all thumbs," she wailed. "Oh, dear, I'll never get this right." She was almost in tears.

"Here, dear, you sit down, and I'll do it." Isabel brought a chair, and Fanny sat down. Isabel took the glossy braids and looped them up skillfully, talking cheerfully while she worked. "We'll have you looking like the Queen in her Garden, in about two minutes. There they go! Now the ribbon. It's a lovely color, isn't it?" She let the rose-colored silk slide through her fingers with a caressing touch.

"Yes. I hunted all over town for just that shade," said Fanny, twisting her head to look at it.

"Did you?" Isabel was surprised, for Fanny had never mentioned the ribbon. "I'd have been

shouting out my affairs to the whole family," she murmured.

Fanny was stiff and tense, her fingers working nervously in her lap. "Oh, dear!" she sighed heavily, now and then.

"That's awfully becoming." Isabel glanced at the figure in the glass. The younger girl was almost startlingly handsome. The bright gleam in her eyes, her flushed cheeks, the arrangement of the hair, the rich tint of the ribbon, all combined to bestow upon her an unusual aspect of beauty. Isabel was startled to notice how Fanny had developed of late. "She's at the age when they seem to stand still, and then suddenly bound ahead," she said to herself. "You never quite know where they are." She forgot that she was scarcely out of that phase, herself.

"It was funny," said Fanny, trying to speak naturally,—"a new girl at school saw me on the street with you and Meta, and she asked me afterward if Meta weren't my sister."

"You do look a little alike," answered Isabel. "I never thought about it before. I suppose it's because you both have such dark hair and eyes." The slight resemblance was an excuse for her staring at Fanny. "Now, let's see, how about your slippers," the older girl went on.

Fanny stuck out her feet encased in pink bedroom slippers. "My white ones are on the shelf," she said.

Isabel brought the white kid slippers from the closet, and put them on Fanny's slender silk-stock-

inged feet. "I never expected to have a lady's maid," said Fanny with a grateful smile.

The lady's maid had been thinking. "I'm afraid I haven't done enough for you, dear," she said with a touch of compunction in her voice. "I'm so busy,— or I think I am — and you always seem so independent —"

"Well, your affairs are more important than mine, I suppose," answered Fanny humbly.

Isabel felt a little stab of remorse. In her absorption in her own activities, she had not given Fanny so much attention as she might have given her. "I've had more experience, and more chance to see things," she thought, "and I ought to have been giving as much as I could."

Fanny slipped off her kimono, and stood in her lace-trimmed camisole and white frilled petticoat. Then Isabel, carefully, so as not to disarrange the braids and the bow, dropped the white muslin dress over her sister's head. All at once, Fanny clutched Isabel's shoulders in her hot twitching hands. "Oh, I'm so scared! I'm so dreadfully scared!" she cried,— her piteous face rising rosily from the cloud of white muslin.

Isabel remembered how terrified she herself had been, that time when she had to "say a piece" at graduation; and how it seemed to her, as the fatal time approached, that she positively could not go through the ordeal. For a while, until her mother calmed her, she had suffered torments. "There, there, Angel Child," she said soothingly, patting Fanny's arm. "It'll be all right. You'll get over

this feeling in no time. When you really have the thing to do, you'll be so interested in that, that you'll forget everything else."

"Oh, I hope so. It's such a lovely piece," quavered Fanny. "I want to play it as it deserves. I couldn't bear to bungle it. Do you know"— her eyes grew very rapt —"I feel as if it were some beautiful live creature — like a bird, you know — and if I didn't play it well, I might *hurt* it! Do you see what I mean?" She looked at Isabel shyly, as if she were in fear of being laughed at. Her face was sentient to the wonder and delight of the music which she longed to express.

"Yes, I do. Of course I do." Isabel dropped a kiss on the glowing cheek of her sister. It crossed her mind again that in her preoccupation she was failing to appreciate a rare and fine personality which lived hidden under a show of bluntness and indifference.

The dress was now fastened and coaxed into place. The Liberty scarf which Isabel had brought to Fanny from London lay in a pink mist across the bed. Isabel took it up and shook it out. "I love it — it's such a heavenly color," Fanny said as she allowed her head to be loosely enveloped in it. "Mother ordered a cab, so I feel very elegant and important," the young musician added, naïvely enjoying the prospect of being wafted to the scene of her martyrdom. Her tension was already somewhat relaxed.

Presently they were all prepared to go. Mrs. Carleton appeared in her blue Georgette crêpe gown, which made her look more like an older sister of the

girls than their "really truly" mother. She was to ride with Fanny, while Isabel and her father were to walk.

When they went downstairs, they found Professor Carleton, in his evening clothes, with his light overcoat on his arm, standing under the hall light, and reading a copy of *Modern Philology*.

"Poor father! He has to sandwich his studying in between the stunts that his family drag him into," giggled Fanny, almost herself again.

They all laughed, and Professor Carleton put the magazine into the pocket of his overcoat, with a look of absent surprise. The cab drove up just then, and the two "aristocrats" got in and were whirled away.

Isabel and Professor Carleton walked at a leisurely step through the mild spring dusk. There was a pungent odor in the air; some of the neighbors had been burning heaps of dry leaves that afternoon, and the suggestion of smoke still lingered.

Isabel, holding to her father's arm, was glad of this little time alone with him. "You seem to get busier and busier every day, don't you, Popsey?" she said, after they had talked about Fanny and the *Paquet du Soldat*.

Professor Carleton sighed, though cheerfully, as if he did not suffer from his burdens. "It seems so, Puss," he admitted. "I don't know that I've ever had so many things to look after, before; but I don't mind a great deal — no, not a great deal," he repeated meditatively.

"Now that old Professor Fenelon is retiring, a lot of extra work is thrown on you, isn't it?"

"Yes. But I'm glad to be able to do it."

Isabel spoke again rather hesitatingly. "You'll be the new head of the department, won't you, father?" This was a subject which had not been openly discussed at home.

"It isn't decided yet," answered Professor Carleton. "There's a good deal to be considered. Some of the Regents are for hiring an Eastern man —"

"But you're an Eastern man, Popsey."

"I was once — a long time ago. I'm a Middle Western man now."

"And you deserve it, too, father — the place, I mean. You've worked hard, and pushed the department as much as you possibly could, and written that stunning book, and done appallingly learned articles for the professional periodicals. They couldn't get an Eastern man who could do any better than all that. And the students love you, father, and that counts for a good deal — a terrific lot, I think. It would be a burning shame if you didn't get it." Isabel spoke with fiery intensity.

"Well, well,— we'll see," parried the professor. His daughter's vehemence made him rather uncomfortable. "I'm not going to consider myself a victim of injustice until I have to." He laughed reassuringly. "So don't get any martyr's halo ready for me, just yet."

"I won't, father. How sane you are!"

They walked silently, for the remaining block, under the great elms which bordered the streets.

Fanny was the last on the short program. When the time came for her to play, she stepped forward beside the piano, absolutely cool, her self-conscious-

ness entirely gone. She showed only the simplicity of the artist who puts his work before himself.

The notes stirred thrillingly through the room, as the violin began to sing in the young girl's hands. Isabel kept thinking of what Fanny had said, "It's like a beautiful live creature." When the music rose to its best sweetness, the words kept saying themselves in Isabel's mind:

> Higher still and higher
> From the earth thou springest
> Like a cloud of fire;
> The blue deep thou wingest,
> And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

A long sigh of real admiration and approval escaped from the audience, when the music was brought to its harmonious close. The persistent applause demanded an encore, and Fanny, all triumphant ease, gave a lilting little dance, played with grace and joy.

At the end of the program, chattering and laughing began, as they do when people have been happily attentive. Isabel touched her mother's arm softly, and whispered in her ear, "Fanny is the flower of the family, mother."

Mrs. Carleton turned with a perplexed smile, and answered, "I don't know but what she is, dear." And she added, "An ordinary girl is problem enough, but a girl with a talent and a temperament is almost more than one mother can face."

"Too bad we can't have two mothers," Isabel said, laughing. "But I'd choose two just exactly like you!"

In spite of their bantering, Mrs. Carleton and Isabel were both rather open-eyed at the glimpse they had had of a different Fanny from the one they had seen every day. But Fanny, a simple schoolgirl again, was joking with Howard Sutro, a high school boy, who was bringing her a plate of ice cream. The artist had vanished, and the brusque mischievous youngster with a healthy appetite and an interest in her own kind had reappeared.

CHAPTER V

WILLING HANDS

ONE afternoon, Isabel was in the workroom of the Arts Department, putting the last touches to a turquoise-and-silver pendant which she had made with her own hands. It had been the result of careful hours, and was the climax of simpler tasks, enthusiastically performed.

"Just think!" she said to Miss Meade, who was standing with her hat on, preparatory to leaving the building, "just think, I feel that this is a real 'child of my brain,' as they say. I worked out the design, and did the whole thing from the beginning. Of course, Miss Phelps supervised it, but she made me *do* everything myself."

"It certainly is charming," said Olivia, coming to look over Isabel's shoulder. "And you've done it beautifully."

"It's simple enough, but I think it's rather effective." Isabel leaned back to gaze ardently at the "child of her brain." "I loved to see it come out and take shape and grow beautiful," she said warmly. "You know what that feeling is."

"I should say I do," answered Miss Meade. "That's the way I feel when I've been planning a room, or even weaving a bit of linen, or dyeing a piece of silk. It's seeing one's thought becoming

visible, isn't it? — thought being transformed into things."

"The thought is always first," replied Isabel meditatively, "and the work just embodies it so that other people can see it."

"That's why it's such a great thing to create even a tiny bit of beauty," added Olivia. "I suppose you'll wear this pendant with delight, even if you do have some pretty things that you got in Europe."

"I? Oh, no, I never thought of wearing this." Isabel looked up with a happy light in her gray eyes. "I'm going to give it to mother."

"To that lovely mother of yours! No wonder you want to heap gifts on her. I should, myself."

"We're going to make it an event," confided the younger girl. "To-night, it's to be. That's why I'm hurrying to finish it, and put on the little ring to hang it by, and everything. I must get a box for it, too," she added, laying down the tool she had been working with. "I mustn't forget that."

"Oh," cried Olivia suddenly, "I have an idea."

"That won't do instead of a box," smiled Isabel.

"But it is a box." Miss Meade ran to her office, and came back with a little box in her hand. "It's Russian," she said eagerly. "I got it at a Russian shop in Chicago — a nice, odd little piece of handiwork. You may have it to put the pendant in, if you like."

"How generous of you!" cried Isabel. The box was really a very delightful article, of a quaint unexpectedness. It was of natural creamy white wood, with delicate tracings painted in dull colors; and a dull-pink pebble was set low in the cover. "Are

you sure you want to give it up?" asked the girl doubtfully. She could hardly imagine herself, she thought, giving up anything so unusual and charming. She held the box off and admired it as she spoke.

"I'd love to give it to your mother," said Olivia simply. "She'd like it, I'm sure."

"She'll treasure it like mad. Thank you *so* much. I'll put a wisp of cotton in it, and display the pendant on that."

"That will be fine. Oh, it's getting late, and I have an engagement. I must be going." Miss Meade hurried away, with a backward nod for Isabel's reiterated thanks.

The other girls in the workroom were busy over their own creations. Isabel finished the small remaining work on the pendant, and clasped the silver ring by which it was to hang. She had already purchased the thin silver chain to go with it.

She could hardly stop looking at it long enough to put away her tools and get her hat out of her locker. She put the box and the pendant in her handbag in such a way that she could peep at them now and again on her way down town. Her errand was a trip to the florist's for a "flower or two"; and then she flew for home. Later, there was a good deal of low-voiced consultation in her room, with Fanny and Celia. All three girls came to dinner in unusual gayety of costume.

When the dessert was finished, and the family were idling over their nuts, Isabel gave a meaning look to Fanny, and then said in a solemn tone, "Mother, we're going to have a little ceremony

now. You and father are not to budge. All you have to do is to be spectators and audience."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Carleton in surprise. "You aren't going to be married, are you? The word *ceremony* is rather appalling."

"You'll see." Isabel's voice was mysterious.

The girls slipped away, and returned in a few minutes in dignified procession. Fanny came first, carrying two lighted candles, in the silver candlesticks. Then came Celia, in her white dress, very important with a bunch of pink roses and ferns. At the last walked Isabel, bearing a silver card tray, on which reposed the Russian box. Bobo followed, his tail waving proudly, as if in some mysterious way he were to be credited with the whole affair.

Mother stared in amazement. Father, who was partly in the secret, laughed quietly.

Fanny and Celia came forward and stood on either side of their mother. Then Isabel, standing beside the table, made a very flowery speech, beginning, "Dear and honored Madam"; and ending, "Herewith we tender you this jewel, as a token of our unwavering affection." She knelt on one knee, and presented the box on the tray.

With a gracious word of thanks, Mrs. Carleton took the box, and raised the cover. She gave a delighted exclamation at the sight of its contents. "How lovely! Isabel, did you do this with your own hands?"

"Yes, indeed I did, mother. I had such a time doing it, but I loved every minute." Isabel was beaming with pleasure in her mother's joy.

"And you wouldn't let me know just what you

were at. It never occurred to me that you might be making something for me. I thank you over and over, and your fellow-conspirators as well." She got up and kissed each of the girls. Fanny set the candles on the table, and Celia thrust the roses into her mother's hands. All five people were talking and laughing at once. The pendant was passed from hand to hand for admiration, and the odd Russian box came in for its share.

" Miss Meade sent that to you," Isabel explained, " and I dare not tell you the splendid things she said about you. It would make your ears burn to a cinder."

" And then how she'd look! " interpolated Fanny.

" Put on the gew-gaw, mother." Isabel clasped the chain about Mrs. Carleton's neck. The silver-and-blue were shown off very attractively against the white lace blouse which the lady was wearing. There was another chorus of praise from the family.

" I have something to add to the festivity," said Professor Carleton, when the chorus had subsided. He took a box of candy from the sideboard drawer, and handed it to Mrs. Carleton. When the lid was removed, there lay on the top of the chocolates, two tickets for the play which was being given at the Fuller Opera House that evening,— a well-known drama in which a well-known actress was to appear. " For you and Isabel," said Professor Carleton, as the tickets came to light.

Isabel clapped her hands. She had been longing to go, but the tickets were beyond her purse. " Oh, father! How perfectly splendid! " she exclaimed. She loved the theater, but did not have many oppor-

tunities to see good plays, partly because there were so few in Jefferson since the moving-pictures had become so popular; and partly because one's allowance simply cannot be stretched to cover everything. There was much happy talk about the play while the chocolates disappeared.

"Isn't it wonderful to have skillful hands!" said Mrs. Carleton. She took off the pendant to look at it again. "I'm very proud of you, Little Daughter." She reached over to pat the hand of Isabel, who was sitting near her.

"I'm so glad I got the inspiration to do this kind of work," the girl responded. "I can remember just how it came to me, out under the apple-trees at Tibbles Green, that this handicraft was what I wanted more than anything else. I wonder how it would have been if Miss Brookert hadn't invited me down to Tibbles Green."

"Oh, I think you would have found out what you wanted, in some way or other," said Mrs. Carleton. "The hands must find their work. And this other girl here has skillful fingers, too." She turned to Fanny, who had just helped herself to a huge chocolate at the bottom of the box.

"I turn 'em to good account," laughed Fanny, holding up the candy, and then taking half of it at a bite.

"Won't you play for us?" suggested Professor Carleton. "Play that charming thing that you gave at the *Paquet du Soldat*."

"If there's time," agreed Fanny, disposing of the rest of the candy.

"Plenty." Professor Carleton looked at his

watch. "You see, our society ladies are already dressed for the evening. Run and get your music-box,"— thus did he irreverently designate Fanny's precious violin.

Fanny came back with her fiddle, and stood up beside the table to play. "It isn't so nice without the piano," she remarked; and began forthwith. Celia snuggled up against her mother, and the various members of the group settled themselves to listen. Isabel felt a serene sense of harmony in the knowledge that the occasion was of her making.

The candles flickered on the table. The blue twilight deepened outside. Within, the happy home faces around the table, the familiar surroundings, the music which the young and nimble fingers called forth made up one of the "dear home doings" which Isabel loved, and which in remembrance she would carry with her, far into her later life.

When Mrs. Carleton and Isabel came home from the theater that night, the air was very cold and sharp. "It's almost as nipping as winter," said the older lady. "I wish I had worn something thicker than this silk coat."

The next morning, when Isabel looked out of her window, she gave a cry. The world seemed suddenly transformed. A light snow had fallen during the night, and where the greenth and freshness of spring had lain, now lay a thin white covering of winter.

Isabel dressed and ran down to the back porch. The sun was bright, and the sky was a vivid blue; clearly, the snow was not to last very long. "But

it's perfect while it's here," cried the girl. It lay in light tufts on the maple boughs, where the red buds pushed richly through. A blue jay in the poplar trees was fluttering his gay wings, and sending down showers of flakes. Here and there, through the snow, the grass and the purple petals of the iris stood out with a fresher tint than before. The lacy intricacies of the last year's stems and seed-pods, not yet overawed by the newer growth, showed darkly against the sparkling background. Isabel could scarcely tear herself away to go in to breakfast.

" I don't believe we realize how lovely the snow is, until we see it in this fleeting way," said Mrs. Carleton, as she poured the coffee.

" Perhaps it's the fact that we know it's fleeting that makes it look particularly attractive," commented the professor. " This will be gone by noon."

" But it's a sight to remember, isn't it? " Isabel sat gazing out of the window, and forgetting to eat. " I'm going to begin planting to-morrow. There can't be any more cold weather after this. Winter has done its worst, and has left this little memento before departing for good."

" Professor Lenner says it's all right to plant now," said Mrs. Carleton. " I asked him yesterday, but I forgot to tell you, Isabel. He's an expert, I think. So now we'll see what you can do as a real live garden-woman."

" I can hardly wait," responded Isabel. " I know I shall just love it."

" Yes, until you've had about three days of it,"

jeered Fanny. "Then you'll be calling on the family in relays."

"Not I. I'll work till I drop in the furrows before I ask any odds of so unsympathetic a crowd of relatives," said Isabel, a little piqued by the skepticism of her sister.

"We shall see what we shall see," answered Fanny with a grin. "Go to it, Isabel. Perhaps you'll astonish the natives."

All that day the sun was glowing and hot; and before noon, as the professor had predicted, the snow had run away in gurgling little rivulets which slunk down sewers and gutters, and sank hurriedly into the earth.

The next day the warm freshness of the air, and the seductive exhalations from the soil convinced the young gardener that the time was ripe for planting.

After classes, Rodney Fox walked down the Hill with her, having snatched a respite from his everlasting mechanical drawing. "I'm going to plant my garden to-day — a part of it at least," she said, as they approached the house.

"So this is the great day! I'll help you, if you don't object to the touch of profane hands on your sacred soil."

"Mercy, no! All sorts of assistance thankfully accepted. Come on in."

In the hall she stopped to say, "Wait a minute till I put on my smock. It's lucky you have on your corduroys, for gardening is hard on the clothes."

She went upstairs and slipped on a blue linen smock over her dress, and bound her hair with a

black velvet ribbon. Rodney was waiting for her in the hall, and they went through the house to the garden. From the back entry, Isabel snatched her gloves and tools.

"You make a regular business of it, don't you?" said Rodney.

"I mean to," answered Isabel. "Mr. Hogan has spaded all the plots over there behind the shrubbery. I do detest little round garden beds here and there, that cut the turf all up into snips. I'm not going to have anything of that sort."

"It's high time you planted," said Rodney. "See how forward everything is. Even some of the tulips are out." He caught sight of some yellow blooms at the end of the garden. "And do you notice how the rose-leaves have expanded?"

"Yes, such a nice reddish brown. And see! The flowering almonds are always so eager to bloom."

"They don't seem to care how cold it is. Nice color, aren't they?"

"Look, Rod." Isabel fished up some packets from the deep pocket of her smock. "Here are the seeds. Don't you love these fascinating paper envelopes, with their rich promises on the front?"

Rodney stared at the gorgeous one which she handed him. "Jack's beanstalk was a dwarf variety compared to this," he said quizzically.

"I love 'em," rejoined Isabel. "They show so much optimism and imagination."

"They show all of that," remarked the young man drily; "not to mention persuasion and gullibility and delusion."

" Well, I'm willing to accept a little delusion along with my optimism, if necessary. Now, look at these scrumptious marigolds. Aren't they fit for a Queen's Garden? They look as big as nice golden whisk brooms." She showed him the gay packet.

" Probably grow to be six inches high," prophesied Rodney; " and the blossoms *may* be visible through a high-powered microscope."

" You're a mean thing. Then look at these snap-dragons,— sprays as long as your arm, and flowers like South American orchids."

Rodney cast a speculative look at the likeness of the snap-dragons. " Might be seen with the naked eye," he conceded. " Well, tell me where all these modern wonders are going, and I'll plant 'em deep in earth, whence they may spring again."

" I want to plant, too. I'm not a fragile flower," protested Isabel.

" Nobody's objecting. Plant all you like," said Rodney. " We'll work together, and all will soon be over."

They stood silent for a minute, looking about the spaded space. The *whirr* of a passing automobile purred from the street, calls of playing children came from adjacent yards, and the twitter of birds sounded in the poplars.

" How you love these things — the color, and all that," said Rodney at last.

" I do. They give me thrills — feelings and thoughts that I can't tell any one." Isabel spoke with repressed fervor.

" I often wish that I could keep up with you," said the young man rather wistfully. " I think I'm with

you, and then all at once you're off on Pegasus (isn't that the name of the broncho with the bi-plane attachment?) and I'm left staring, with my big feet on the ground."

"Then you can catch Pegasus by the tail and haul him back, before he has carried me very far," laughed the girl. "I don't want to get too high among the clouds."

"Pegasus is an elusive beast. I only hope he won't become a domestic animal," muttered Rodney. "Do you want these whisk-brooms planted here, or over there along the wall?" he went on briskly.

"Not there, I think. I'm going to put the nasturtiums there, and have a riot of color among the leaves."

"I didn't know where the nasturtiums were going to riot,"— Rodney was pretending to grumble. "Where are the marigolds going to ramp, then?"

"Don't you think this would be a good place?" The garden-woman indicated a space along the walks. "The tulips will be gone, of course, long before the mary-golds come on."

"Here goes, then." There was a silence while they dug little holes in the brown earth and dropped in the tiny seeds. Isabel enjoyed the company of Rodney, because she did not feel that she had to "gabble" all the time, and that he had to be continually entertained. "There's something marvelous about the soil," Rodney mused, after a few minutes of planting. His quizzical air was gone. "It's so — so quiescent, I think the word is — so calm and patient, you know. It waits year after year, perhaps centuries, for the seed to be brought; and

then, when it does come, the soil is ready with all its forces to bring the seed to growth."

"Yes," assented Isabel. "It's ready to produce something good if it's given a chance."

There was a silence again. Isabel was on her knees, on the grassy edge of the plot which they were planting. "When I'm out here, you know, I think of Molly; I think of life,— in the soil, in the seeds and plants and buds — and Molly seems to me more and more to be all life. I don't know whether you see what I mean —"

"I think I do," said Rodney gravely, as he patted the ground over the seeds he had put in.

"I keep thinking of the verse in the Bible, where it says, 'That they might have life . . . and have it more abundantly.'"

"She has it," said the boy simply.

"And I have, too. I think, if you know more about things, and understand more, and — and love more, then you do have life more abundantly. Don't you think so?" Isabel spoke in a low voice, as if she scarcely dared to tell her inner thoughts.

"I surely do."

They rose from their knees, Isabel with a little gasp over aching muscles. There was a warm, kindly sympathy between the two young people that made them very happy, but a trifle shy.

"Now, what do we plant next?" Rodney was using a studiously commonplace tone.

"The mignonette. It's nice to put in with other things, when one makes a bouquet. And, oh, yes! The bluebells ought to find a place. I'm determined to have bluebells."

"Next year, if all this talk about food shortage keeps on, you'll be planting cabbages instead of bluebells, and turnips instead of mignonette," reflected Rodney.

"Yes." Isabel was downcast for the moment. "There's no telling what next year will bring. That's why, somehow, I feel that this one ought to be as happy — as *flowery* — as it can. When the time comes, we'll eat our turnips, no matter how unpalatable they may be."

Rodney knew that she meant something else besides turnips, and he sympathized with her desire to grasp the present moment, and make it yield all the joy it had to give. He said as much, in the look he gave her.

His mind went to France, where the great world-battle was being fought. "Herb doesn't say anything about coming back," he said, digging the toe of his shoe into the loosened soil. "But he tells me to stick hard to my engineering, and get all the practical experience I can. He says that young American engineers will be in great demand — over there — before long."

Isabel threw him a startled glance, and turned back to her planting, without a word. And then they began to talk about Meta, and a prospective picnic, and school affairs of various kinds. They worked on, until the air grew cooler, and the sun hung low.

"Better stop now," said Rodney decisively. "It's hard work, and you aren't used to it."

Isabel sighed wearily, and put her hand to her

back. "It is hard on any one who isn't trained to this particular form of exercise."

"I suppose I'd better trot along," Rodney continued. "Mother's having guests for dinner, and she told me in plain words that I'd have to make myself more than usually presentable. Mothers have a way of wanting their only children to look like Fifth Avenue swells."

"Yes. I tell mother that she's always expecting her Ugly Ducklings to look like swans." Isabel smiled indulgently.

"Well, if no one ever had any uglier ducklings than your mother, the world wouldn't be a bad place to live in." Rodney was wiping his forehead with a handkerchief which gave signs of the afternoon's hard usage.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Isabel, reddening.

"I like the looks of 'em, anyway," said Rodney.

"Your own mother's duckling isn't so bad," ventured Isabel teasingly.

"Say, we're rather previous, aren't we,— throwing bouquets when the garden is just planted?"

Isabel was willing to change the subject. "I want a bouquet to take into the house," she said. "Don't you want to cut me some of those irises? I'm too tired to bend over another bit."

"Surely." Rodney took out his knife, and cut a half-dozen of the low-growing purple irises near at hand.

"They'll be exquisite in the beautiful orange-colored vase that you gave me," glowed the girl as she took the flowers.

Rodney's eyes showed his pleasure. "Glad you like it," was all he said. Then he took his coat from a bench; he had abandoned it in the ardor of his labors. "I must be going," he said. "I won't tramp through the house with my dirty shoes. Good-by. I've had a fine time, Isabel."

"Thank you so much for helping me, Rod."

"Don't mention it. I'll help you some more. I like it."

"Good-by."

After Rodney had gone, Isabel went into the house. Tired and grimy as she was, she stopped to fill the beloved vase with water, and put into it the iris blossoms and the graceful ribbon-like leaves. The color delighted her. She ran her fingers lovingly over the flowers and the clear outline of the jar. "That they might have life more abundantly," she murmured, as she turned to go upstairs.

CHAPTER VI

THE FAIR MELISSY

THE time of Olga's wedding approached. The dress was bought, and a seamstress came in to make it. Olga, like one in a dream, went vaguely about her work, and in the intervals tried on dress, slippers, and accessories. Household affairs suffered; and Mrs. Carleton, with a hunted look, seemed always rushing about with a duster in her hand, or a belated order for the grocer. It was with something of relief that she agreed that Olga was to go home to Mrs. Jensen's a week before the wedding.

On the afternoon of Olga's departure, Melissy was to arrive. Mrs. Stuart had sent a letter arranging matters. Isabel was reading a letter in the hall, just before starting for her class, when Mrs. Carleton came to the door to say doubtfully, "My dear, I think it falls to you to go and meet Melissy. I don't like to have the poor girl arrive without any one at the station."

Isabel folded the letter and put it into the envelope. "All right, mother," she answered promptly. "I think I can manage it by close calculation. I was going to watch Meta rehearse. I did really want to see that."

"Well, the train gets in at five-twenty. I think you can work it out, can't you? I have to go to

Mrs. Rayne's tea, and then come home and get the dinner started."

"Yes, yes. I'll be there with the bells on, as Rod says," responded Isabel gayly.

Mrs. Carleton frowned. "You know I don't like slang, child," she said more fretfully than was her wont.

"I know you don't, mother. But you wouldn't want me to be a plaster-of-Paris girl, would you, without any imperfections whatever? I'll bet you'd get terribly tired of me, if I never did a thing you didn't like." Isabel came over and patted her mother's cheek appealingly.

The lady's face cleared. "Of course I should, dear. I like you to do things that I don't like."

"So that you can correct me, eh? Well, there's no danger that I shan't give you enough correcting to do. But listen a minute." Mrs. Carleton was poised for a flight to the dining-room, where the table was still standing with the remnants of luncheon. "I want to tell you that I have a letter from Madame Doret."

Mrs. Carleton had heard so much about the Franco-Hindoo family whom Isabel had known in London, that she almost felt that she knew them herself. "What does Madame say?" she asked, restraining herself from dashing away to the tasks which awaited her. "Does she write in English?"

"No, in French. She writes with a good deal of charm, I think. They are still in London. Monsieur is almost entirely recovered from his illness, but his arm is stiff yet. He expects to be formally

discharged from the army very soon, now; and as soon as they can arrange things and get passage, they are going back to Singapore."

"They haven't had a very cheerful time in England."

"No, not so very. But Madame Doret is so delighted at Monsieur's having escaped alive that she can't think of anything else."

"It is a comfort. I don't see how the wives and mothers *endure* things over there." Mrs. Carleton choked as she spoke.

"Nor I, mother!" Isabel caught her breath. What if some one she cared for very much had to face the horrors and dangers of battle? She thought of Edwin Shelburne, whom she had met in England, and whom she had liked; and then she thought of some one else. "I could never bear it," she said sharply.

"How are the Lion and the Angel?" asked Mrs. Carleton.

"Getting along finely." Isabel was glad to go back to the details of the letter. "They've learned very fast from the Belgian governess, and she's no end good to them — takes them around and shows them things, and keeps them amused and interested. Madame says that they ask after Mademoiselle Isabel ever so often." Isabel had been kind to the bewildered youngsters, when their father had been called away to war.

"It was nice that you could do something for the little creatures."

"I didn't do much. Poor little souls! I think

they'll be happier when they get back to the tropics. They seemed like transplanted herbs. I hope that the world will be good to them as they grow up."

"Those Eurasians don't find the world any too generous. Neither race seems to feel friendly toward them."

"It's terribly unjust. I'm glad that the Dorets have money, anyway, and can make themselves comfortable." Isabel folded the letter thoughtfully. "Madame was such a dear, helpless, hopeless little piece of humanity."

"Who?" cried Fanny, coming into the hall on her way upstairs. "Who's helpless and hopeless?"

"Why, we were just speaking of Madame Doret, in England," explained Mrs. Carleton. "Isabel has a letter from her. She seemed to find the world a very trying place."

"Who?" shouted Celia, skipping into the circle with Bobo jolting on her shoulder. "Who?"

"Goodness me!" cried Isabel, laughing with vexation. "Can't we have a word together? Any one would think, to hear all these *whoo-whoo's,* that this was the Owl Family, instead of the Carletons."

"Whoo-whoo!" shouted Celia, overjoyed with the suggestion. "Oh, I'd rather be an Owl than a Carleton, any day."

As she went out, Isabel heard Fanny and Celia echoing "Whoo-whoo!" to each other all the way upstairs. She opened the door again to call to her mother, "I'll bring the fair Melissy home to you as carefully as if she were the Empress of China, and made of china at that."

"I couldn't ask more of you," called Mrs. Carle-

ton in reply. She had already begun to pick up the luncheon dishes.

As Isabel went on her way to the University, her mind reverted to the incidents of her Wonder-year in Europe, and particularly those of the last few weeks in London. "It doesn't seem as if I were the same person," she sighed regretfully. Life in college seemed very tame beside the freer life among stimulating events abroad.

After her classes were over, she ran upstairs in Main Hall, to the rooms of the Public Speaking Department, which were on the top floor. A rehearsal of the Red Domino play was about to begin. The actors were scattered about the large recitation room, conversing volubly with one another.

Meta Houston was having a discussion with Wilfred Collins, the leading man. He was a tall slender youth, with regular features and cool blue eyes. Meta was saying, "I think Althea ought to step backward a little, and stare, and then cover her face with her hands — like this." She went through the motions which she had indicated.

"No, no, I don't think that's the thing at all," Collins was saying irritably. "Now, look here: I go through this piece of business about the letter, you know; I read it through slowly, and then crumple it up in my hand, and then look up, and say, 'Did *you* write this, Althea?' And then you —"

"Oh, I beg your pardon,— that's not the right way to say it," interrupted Meta. "It isn't 'Did *you* write this, Althea?' It's, 'Did you write *this*, Althea?'— *This!* as if you couldn't believe your eyes. And then —"

"I'm sure I'm right about it," insisted Collins immovably. "I've tried it a dozen ways, and this is *the* right one."

"What do you think, Isabel?" Meta turned to her friend, who was listening with absorbed attention.

"Dear me, it all sounds perfectly grand to me," exclaimed Isabel. "When I hear it one way, it seems all right, and when I hear it the other, that seems just as it should be, too."

"That's not much help," complained Meta.

"We don't need help on this. I'm sure I have the right way," said Collins with a cold look at the outsider.

"Here comes Miss Henderson," said Meta with relief. "We'll have to take her decision when we come to the place in the play." A tall dark woman, the head of the Public Speaking Department, was approaching. She was very straightforward and unsentimental in her appearance.

"I know my way is right," muttered Collins.

"Come, come, let's get right at our work," said Miss Henderson, in a businesslike way. The actors took their places at the end of the room, and the rehearsal began. It would go swimmingly for a few minutes, and then Miss Henderson would cry out sharply, "Oh, that's wrong! that's awful. Try that again, and stand further back, Mr. Bloch. Miss Sellers, haven't you any voice at all? You won't be heard beyond the footlights. And don't squeak, just because you're supposed to be angry. Now! once more! Put some life into it. This isn't a sanitarium."

Then there would be a few minutes more of practicing.

"Oh, I never get that right," complained Miss Sellers in the midst of a speech. "How do you think I ought to say that, Miss Henderson?"

"If you'd remember that *you're* not saying it, but the character you're playing, you'd get along better. Say it as you think she would say it," Miss Henderson answered crisply. "Now, Miss Houston, here's your cue."

Meta spoke a few lines fluently.

"That's good — very good." The teacher nodded. "Oh, now you're spoiling it. Do that over."

And so they would go on, sometimes doing the same sentence twenty times, and sometimes gliding on for five minutes without a break. To Isabel it was fascinating,— this process of seeing something grow. She watched Meta, too, feeling the vitality of the girl, the vividness, the earnestness, the spirit, the passion for hard labor, and then the quick resilience of her nature. Isabel was thinking how, last fall, she had looked askance at Meta, because she did not have the rather colorless conventionality of the other girls. The Western girl had seemed to Isabel too exuberant and untamed,— a kind of barbaric princess who took her own whims too much for guides in her association with other people.

"She's changed," said Isabel to herself. "She's subdued, but she has never lost one bit of the thing that made her an individual. That's what mother — and Cousin Eunice, when she was here — could do for her. They knew how to bring out the best;

and without seeming to try, they just let the undesirable elements fade away. That's what skill and love and kindness can do." And then she thought, "It was Rod who got me started at liking her, and who made the chance for her to have mother's help."

She watched the clock, and at the last moment she dared, she slipped away and caught a car to the station. She had not stood many minutes on the platform before the train from Dalton came puffing in.

The passengers began getting off the train, and Isabel watched them one by one. Toward the last, she spied the angular figure of Melissy. Isabel had never seen her in her coat and hat, but always in her print dresses and aprons. Melissy wore a shabby gray suit, with a little jacket, and a round felt hat with a limp feather at the side. She carried a canvas "telescope," and an umbrella.

Isabel ran up and greeted her cordially. "Oh, here you are, Melissy," she cried. "I'm awfully glad you've come."

Melissy looked relieved. "I'm glad to get here," she answered, in her uncompromising voice. "I was kind-a hoping some one'd be at the train. I says to myself, 'Now, it would be just like Miss Isabel or Miss Fanny to come down and give me a boost.'"

"We thought you'd like some one to meet you. Did you bring a trunk?"

"No, I just checked a big suit-case. I've got the check in my pocket-book." Melissy carefully set down the telescope, and fumbled for the piece of pasteboard.

Isabel took it, and quickly arranged with a baggage-man to bring up the suit-case. "Come on, Melissy. We'll go up in a car," she called, beckoning.

They walked along together. Melissy turned to look after a particularly gaudy piece of millinery. "Every one has nice new hats on, and I feel like a gawk," she said nervously. "Your grandmother said she thought it'd be kind-a too bad to get a hat in Dalton, when it would be so much more fun getting it in Jefferson. I imagined she was right, but I wish, now, that I'd have stodged up something with a flower on it, so's not to look like a clown in my old winter hat."

"Now, don't you worry, Melissy," Isabel consoled her; "nobody'll notice, just on the way up to the house, and as soon as you like, you can get a new hat. I'll go with you, and help you pick it out, if you want me to."

"Oh, would you? I never dreamt you'd do that," cried Melissy. "Your grandmother says you have such a good time, and go around so much,— and work at your studies, too." The tone in which the country girl spoke gave Isabel a twist at the heart. The eagerness and the timidity in Melissy's eyes were very appealing to the college girl, whose life had been so fortunate and so sheltered.

"I'll find time for the hat. Never fear," said Isabel gayly.

"If I could get something like the hat with the blue flowers that you had on the first time I saw you, I'd be awful pleased. I ain't never forgot it," Melissy went on, growing more confidential.

"It was rather a pretty one," answered Isabel.

"Maybe we can discover something of the same sort. We stand here to wait for the State Street car. Now, notice whether a car has *Winger Park* or *South Jefferson* on it. A Winger Park car, or a University Heights will do for us — they both go up State Street — but a South Jefferson car is always wrong." She explained the car system to Melissy, with great care and minuteness. "When you're out alone, you won't have any trouble in getting around," she remarked.

The car came whizzing along, and they got on. During the short trip, Melissy looked eagerly out of the window. "My! Is that the State House?" she said when they came to the Capitol Building. "It wasn't finished when I was here, four years ago. It's awful big and white. I didn't suppose there ever was such a big building."

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Isabel replied. "See! It's pink at the top, now that the sun is getting low, and the rest of it is all in blue shadow."

"It's terrible pretty," exclaimed Melissy. "I just want to look and look."

"That's the way I feel when I'm in a new place," said Isabel. "I like to stare to my heart's content. You must do it, too, if you feel like it."

Several people whom Isabel knew got on the car, and she nodded to them. Melissy began to mourn again. "I don't know what your friends'll think," she whispered,—"me in this prune of a hat."

Isabel could not help smiling at the other girl's concern. "They won't mind, I'm sure," she said to Melissy.

In a few minutes they got off the car, and walked

the short block to the house. "It's a nice house." Melissy looked appraisingly at it. "It's not so big as your grandmother's, but the vine is pretty and that maple at the side."

"We have more yard at the back than at the front," Isabel explained.

Mrs. Carleton, with a long apron on, met them in the hall. "I'm glad to see you, Melissy," she said in her friendly way. "Miss Isabel will show you where your room is. Perhaps you will want to rest, after your trip."

"Land, no, Mrs. Carleton," protested Melissy. "I'll be down in no time, and get the dinner on the table. I'll just lay off my hat and wash my hands."

"In no time" she was down, in a white apron, with her hair neatly smoothed. "I'll be a mite awkward, I expect," she said modestly, "but soon's I get the hang of things, I'll be smart as a cricket."

"We try to keep things simple," said Mrs. Carleton. "It won't take you long to learn."

Melissy was soon deep in the mysteries of dinner, and Mrs. Carleton was explaining about the refrigerator and the salt-box and the potato-masher, when Celia rushed in. "Well, here's my girl!" cried Melissy, who was about to drain the potatoes. She put the kettle on the stove, and reached out her hands to Celia. The little girl took the maid's work-hardened hands in hers, and spun her around and around.

"Isn't it gr-and to have Melissy here!" she cried.

Melissy gave the child a hug. "I declare, I've been hankering to see you," she said earnestly.

"I'm glad you've come to stay with us," repeated Celia.

"Oh, ho! Are you, now?" said Melissy, going back to the potatoes.

"Yes. I liked Olga, but I like you in a different way. You talk differently, too, Melissy."

"Land o' Goshen! I never thought about it, but I don't know as it's any wonder that I don't talk like a Swede. I'm an old-fashioned American, tongue and all."

"It isn't a bad thing to be," commented Mrs. Carleton.

"I guess it isn't. Now, lady, if you'll just show me about one or two things more, I believe I can get along here, just as clever as a kitten. You can go and sit down."

Mrs. Carleton took off her apron with a sigh of relief. "I'd be glad to," she said. "I'm tired, after a very busy day."

At dinner, while Melissy was in the kitchen, Professor Carleton said as if it had just occurred to him, "Melissy has a lot of personality, hasn't she?"

"Yes, she has," answered his wife, "but in spite of her independence she is rather pathetic to me. I want you girls to be especially nice to her," she added, as she turned to her daughters. "Grandmother has treated her like one of the family, and we mustn't hurt her feelings."

"Mother, aren't we always nice to the people who help us here in the house?" asked Isabel in a protesting tone.

"Indeed you are. But—"

"She wants us to treat Melissy as we'd like to be treated if we had to work for other people in the same way. Isn't that it, mother?" said Fanny soberly.

"Yes, I think it is."

"I'll be just as good to her as if she was Isabel," piped Celia. But just then Melissy entered with the dessert, and the conversation was closed.

The household was soon running smoothly again, under the relentless management of Melissy. She was fiercely energetic and painfully conscientious in the smallest details of the domestic affairs. Where Olga had carried out orders with calm and steadfast obedience, Melissy always thought everything out beforehand and presented it complete to her somewhat dazed mistress.

She would come to Mrs. Carleton with a bit of paper in her fingers, which she consulted from time to time. "I thought you'd like to have the pantry shelves cleaned to-morrow," she would say. "And then the next day I can wash and iron the curtains in the kitchen and pantry and hall and bathroom, and put 'em up again. And while I'm at the shelves, I might as well give a good polish to the silver and glassware, and put everything back in good shape. Does this idee suit you, Mrs. Carleton? Of course, if it don't —"

"Oh, yes, yes, that's fine," the relieved housekeeper would exclaim. "And by the way, I haven't thought what to have for dinner to-night. Have you?"

"I made out a list here, of what we might have. We've got everything in the house for it except the

fish," Melissy would explain modestly. "I cooked some prunes, and I thought I'd make a nice prune whip for des'-ert. I'll run out now and get the fish if you want me to."

"I feel as if I were a guest in my own house," Mrs. Carleton confided to Isabel. "Melissy does dearly love to run things. That's the American of it, I believe."

"It's a joy, isn't it, Mumsey?"

"It's almost like taking a vacation." Mrs. Carleton sighed. Nobody but Isabel knew how tired the housemother could get of the constant succession of dinners that vanished with "one snap and a lick of the chops"; of curtains that always had to be taken down or put up; of clothes to be put away securely from the consuming appetite of the moth; of tablecloths to be mended, silver to be polished, shelves to be straightened, rugs to be cleaned, bedding to be renewed. "Melissy can keep me out of the asylum if anybody can," murmured the harassed lady; and her lips really trembled as she spoke.

"Poor mother. You always take things so philosophically that we don't realize what a lot we expect of you." Isabel gave her mother a hug. "Let's all be thankful that you're to be tyrannized over by Melissy for a while at least."

Isabel snatched time one afternoon to go with Melissy to get a hat, and they achieved a smart little cream-colored straw trimmed with blue corn-flowers which exactly satisfied the yearnings of Melissy's heart. "And so cheap, too," Isabel exulted, while Melissy showed off the hat to Mrs. Carleton. "We picked out the shape among some untrimmed hats,

and then rummaged till we found the corn-flowers; she felt as if she just couldn't live unless she had corn-flowers, didn't you, Melissy? And the woman only charged a quarter for sewing the flowers on, and putting on that black velvet ribbon that I'd brought along — and everything was perfect." Mrs. Carleton, beholding the happy face beneath the hat, agreed that it was. "And I'm going to show Melissy how to do her hair so that it won't be quite so tight over her ears — so it'll come out under the hat a little more —"

Already Melissy's face seemed less thin and sharp, and her expression less hungry for happiness.

One noon, that same week, George Burnham telephoned that he and his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Keating, wished to take Isabel and Meta for an automobile ride out to Middleton, where they would have supper. Plans were hastily rearranged, and Isabel went, rejoicing in the weather and the company. She was getting so that she liked George Burnham more and more. He had an easy, satirical way of speaking which made one think that he was flippant and indifferent; but Isabel had before this decided that he was really a very earnest and solid-minded person.

She sat next to him at supper, and she gained a little glimpse of his inner thoughts, which he usually kept carefully concealed. He had been telling her a most amusing incident which had occurred in the Public Works office, concerning a bridge and a Norwegian farmer. And then he said abruptly, "I'm tired of this indoor work. I ought never to have taken the position. What I want is practice."

"But why did you take it, then? You've had it ever since you left college, haven't you?"

"Yes; two years," answered Burnham. "I was offered the job in the office just before I left the Engineering School. I wanted to go out and get some practical work, no matter whether I earned anything or not; but my father had got into a hole, financially, and I had to help him out. I had to take the first thing that came to hand that had a steady salary attached to it. I simply had to send home money to keep the pot boiling, as it were. But now father's getting on his feet again, and I'm going to be freer."

Isabel wondered what he meant to do with his freedom, but he answered the question for her. "I want to get rough practical experience as soon as I can. It's going to be needed."

Isabel remembered what Rodney had said the other day in the garden,—"Young American engineers will be in great demand — over there — before long." She answered Burnham vaguely, but she was very busy thinking, all the way back in the dusk and moonlight.

During the week, other events rushed quickly by, and the day came for Olga's wedding. Fanny and Celia went, and came home full of talk about it. It was the first wedding which Celia, at least, had seen.

"Olga looked perfectly fine," said Fanny. "She was a lot prettier than I've ever seen her look before."

"Her hair was all crimpy," interrupted Celia, "and it looked like gold, and then the veil was just like a nice white cloud —"

"And her dress was awfully becoming," broke in Fanny. "She didn't look clumsy a bit in it —"

"And they stood in front of a lot of green branches and things —"

"Olga said she wanted it as much like an outdoor wedding in Sweden as it could be —"

"Only her clothes were different. She loved the white dress, she said."

"And a girl wore a lot of funny clothes, just like those they wear in the mountains in Sweden —"

"And an old man played a fiddle." Celia's face was alight with the remembrance.

"Queer, sad humming tunes," supplemented Fanny. "He said he'd teach me to play 'em. There was a dance that he'd learned years and years ago, in Norway —"

"He was an awful nice old man," explained Celia. "He held me on his lap, and said funny things to me in Norwegian."

"And they had gorgeous things to eat — all crumbly and rich and delicious —"

"Did Mr. Evestad figure in the affair at all?" asked Isabel, laughing. "The bridegroom ought to count for something at a wedding — but he never seems to."

"Oh, he was all right," Fanny replied. "He looked terribly stiff and scared, and got as red as a beet when he had to make the answers. Olga didn't get red — not she. She was as cool as a cucumber."

"Cucumbers and beets — it was almost a garden party," muttered Isabel frivolously.

But Fanny was rattling on. "And would you believe it, he and Olga did a dance in the middle of

the floor, and the old man played the fiddle, and it was awfully nice — not funny a bit. They went toward each other, and then back, and they kept time perfectly, with beautiful odd steps. Let's show them, Celia." Fanny hummed, and she and Celia did an impromptu dance on the sitting-room rug,— Fanny sure and graceful, Celia bewildered but eager to do her part. The older girl kept on humming after the dance had faded away. "That's the dance that the old man is going to teach me," she went on. "It's frightfully old. He said he learned it from his grandfather, and it came down ages ago from a troll who was a fiddler, away off in a glen somewhere — it's a queer story."

"And so Olga is safely married," said Mrs. Carleton, with a sympathetic smile for the troll in the glen. "I hope the dear creature will be happy."

"She deserves to be," said Isabel.

"Mrs. Jensen cried," reported Celia. "I don't see why."

"I guess she was thinking of their old home in Sweden," said Fanny slowly. "You know, their father and mother aren't living any more. It must be hard, to leave your own father and mother, and come so far away, and then have them —" Her voice failed. She went and laid her head on her mother's shoulder.

Mrs. Carleton held Fanny close. "Well, even if Olga is gone, we have Melissy," she said cheerfully.

CHAPTER VII

"FRILLY THINGS"

NOWADAYS Meta was rehearsing nearly every day. It was something of a strain, in view of the fact that studying had to be done, just the same, and that there were increasing temptations to spend the evenings in having a good time. One afternoon early in May, Isabel climbed the stairs to the Public Speaking Department, and waited till Meta came out of the room where the rehearsals were held.

There was an unsual droop in the spirits of the amateur actress. She was flushed and tired, and there were dark circles under her eyes. "I'm ready to drop," she said wearily. "Let's go outside and sit for a little while."

They ran downstairs, and out into the soft afternoon air. The trees on the campus were in full leaf now, and their varied greens were flecked by the white of dogwood and wild plum blossoms.

"Come on, let's sit in the Spoon Holder," said Isabel.

They made their way through the grass, to the marble bench, popularly called the Spoon Holder, for obvious reasons. It was situated on a small promontory overlooking the lake. The water was very quiet, on this particular day, and the buildings

on the further shore stood out with unusual distinctness. Isabel had lately become able to look at the lake without thinking too many tragic thoughts of what had happened there many months before.

"I'll be glad when this play is over," said Meta, sinking into the corner of the bench. She threw back her head and drew in the air thirstily, as if she could not get enough of it.

"It will be over pretty soon," said Isabel as encouragingly as she could. She herself rather dreaded the pressure of work and worry that would have to be endured before the play were an accomplished fact.

"I had a letter from father to-day," said Meta, after a short silence.

"What did he say?" Isabel was wondering whether she ought to tell Meta what George Burnham had hinted about the need of "rough practical experience," at the supper at Middleton.

"He's been in British Columbia, you know, for a long time, looking after some of his saw-mills —"

"Yes, I know," said Isabel.

"And now he's in Seattle. He seems different — happier. His letters are longer and not so gloomy — not nearly so depressed. In fact, now that I think of it, he seems to have been getting happier for some time."

"Well, that's good, Meta." Isabel was using a sprightly tone to cover up the fact that she was not listening very intently.

"Yes, of course. But he seems to be suddenly worried about me — wants to know whether I'm improving — getting toned down, as he puts it."

"Oh!" Isabel's tone had in it a reproach for Mr. Houston.

"I've told him ever so many times how your mother and Mrs. Everard — and you, Izzy-Wizzy, though you may deny it — have helped me and guided me and — and — loved me, until I'm almost as well behaved as anybody." Meta smiled with a little ironical wistfulness. "But I don't suppose he half reads my letters."

"It's nice to have him take such an interest, dear." Isabel was more attentive now.

Meta spoke again, raising her voice passionately. "He never seems to have understood that it made much difference how I came up, and now all of a sudden he seems to be wonderfully concerned as to whether my manners are as refined as they ought to be."

"He hasn't seen you for so long — he doesn't know how nice you are!" Isabel laughed deprecatingly and squeezed Meta's arm.

"And he wants to know whether more money will help me any," Meta went on,—"to hire a chaperon or something. Money!" The girl's eyes filled with tears. "As if money could take the place of love and care! Sometimes I hate the very word *money*."

"It's his way of wanting to do something for you, Meta. Men are so queer. They think some material thing will please and satisfy us. They don't understand how to express their good intentions in any other way," Isabel said with a wise look.

"I suppose so. Oh, I know I'm unjust to father He has always meant well, you know, but he's been

awfully absorbed in his business and his own affairs, and sort of thought that a girl could get along almost any way, as long as she had plenty of money given to her."

"I think you've done beautifully," cried Isabel with sincerity. "You've done so well in your studies and in your dramatic work. I never knew any one who could work harder than you, and yet you don't make a burden of working."

Meta was looking hard across the lake. "I have honestly tried," she said. "I didn't always understand about things; and when I got to suffering about the things I'd missed, I'd try to cover up my feelings by being very gay and rash, and making myself believe that I was having a wonderful time."

"You've made up for the things you've missed," said Isabel soberly.

"Perhaps, a little. Father is beginning to realize, I suppose, that he hasn't given me the right sort of training. But he should have thought of that, eight years ago. He comes of a splendid family, you know, and he's a well educated man, but he just seemed to let go when mother died."

"Now, Meta," began Isabel sternly. "You're all right, and your father is all right, too. I don't see what in the world you're fussing about. *I* couldn't ask you to be any different — and goodness knows I'm a critical minx, if there ever was one!"

"It seems as if father and I ought to have done more for each other," sighed the other girl.

"Well, there's time enough yet." Isabel was aggressively cheerful.

"He may come on here, in a few weeks, he says,"

Meta continued, "and then he and I can talk these things all over. I've never done any really straight thinking on them before." There was a long silence, as if Meta were reviewing the past and probing the future. Isabel grew uncomfortable, and began to talk very firmly about other things. As the shadow of the trees fell across the Spoon Holder, they rose to go home.

Meta seemed rested and cheered. On the way down the Hill, they came up with Iola Fleming, who was looking very calm and satisfied in a white serge suit. After they had greeted one another, Iola said, "It seems so nice to have you two girls such good friends. You're awfully fond of each other, aren't you?"

"Yes, indeed, we are," answered Isabel with extra emphasis, to make up for the fact that Meta did not reply.

"You're so picturesque together," Iola continued blandly,—"one so dark and the other so fair."

"You didn't think we went together on that account, did you?" Meta blurted out scornfully.

"Goodness, no." Iola looked surprised. "I know it's because you like each other; but it's nice that you look so interesting, too. I was just thinking how horribly near it is to the end of my last year in college. You have another year, yet, Meta, and you ought to be thankful."

"Yes; but I suppose we ought to begin to plan in our junior year what we are going to do when our college course is over," Meta responded, as if she were talking to herself. She never wasted much speech on Iola.

"Don't you know yet?" Iola was very complacent in her own resolves. "I've made up my mind that I'm going to *express* myself or die. I think, when you've got something in your heart, it's your duty to see that it gets expressed."

"You mean you're going to express yourself in verse. What if nobody wants the verse?" said Meta cruelly. Iola was irritating her more than usual.

"Oh, they've got to want it. And I'm not going to express myself in poetry merely. I'm going to write novels and every sort of thing."

"There are different ways of bringing out what one has to express," spoke up Isabel conciliatingly, for she saw Meta opening her lips for another satirical remark. She was secretly amused at her friend's glowering look. "I think a good pudding expresses the soul of the cook."

"Oh, yes, of course," returned Iola hastily. She had to consider things seriously or not at all. "But I'm talking about the higher things. After you've spent four years in college, you ought to be concerned only with the higher things. Leave the lower every-day things for those who have never had any cultural opportunities."

"M-mh," meditated Isabel. "Perhaps the lower things might become high, and the higher things low, because of the way in which they're done."

"I don't know what you mean," said Iola. "Anyway, I have to leave you here. I envy you, Isabel, having so much time before you, in college."

"I'm very glad it isn't *my* last year," confessed

Isabel. She was glad to say good-by to Iola, for Meta was chafing and frowning.

"Conceited prig!" cried Meta violently, after Iola had turned away. "It's a lucky thing she doesn't have to support herself, with her high-souled twaddle. She'd be mighty glad to have a good pudding once in a while, and she'd certainly express herself in eating it."

"Oh, now, Meta," said Isabel, who really liked Iola, "she's a good soul at heart."

"I suppose so," Meta grumbled. "But she bores me with her silly talk."

"What *are* you going to do when you leave college?" asked Isabel, to change the subject. "We haven't talked about it for a long time."

"You know well enough that I want to go on the stage," answered Meta, still frowning. "But then, there's father. I ought to be with him. And then — there's something else." Her face softened.

Isabel did not dare to ask whether that something else had anything to do with George Burnham. "Of course, things are complicated for you," she murmured, in order to say something intelligent.

"I think I ought to make a home for father," Meta was going on. "It isn't right for him to be alone so much — I can see that now — without a center for his interests. Since I've seen your home — the one your mother makes for all of you — a home seems so much more worth while. I never thought it amounted to so much, before."

"Perhaps you'll make one for yourself, Meta," said Isabel boldly.

Meta flushed and tried to look as if she did not

understand what Isabel meant. "I feel, as I said," she replied, "as if I ought to give up my own desires and ambitions, no matter how much they mean to me."

"It would be terrible to give up your dramatic work," argued Isabel, very much distressed. "You could do well on the stage — there isn't a doubt of it."

"Perhaps." Meta held her head high. "But don't I have a duty that has to be considered?"

"It sounds awfully noble," responded Isabel doubtfully. "However, I'm not at all sure that one person ought to accept such a sacrifice from another. And how do you know," she queried triumphantly, "that your father would let you give up so much for him?"

Meta looked startled. "I hadn't thought of that," she said hesitatingly.

"Better think about it."

The girls parted at the corner. Isabel herself was doing some thinking as she went on toward home. "It *sounds* all right," she said to herself. "It's like the things that people do in books, but I wonder if it is just as right as it sounds? I wonder whether Meta isn't deceiving herself just as much as Iola is? Wouldn't she be sorry, after the first enthusiasm of self-satisfaction was over? And would her father be right in letting her give up her whole career, just to 'hold down' a home for him, when he's away so large a proportion of the time? I shall be keen for seeing how it works out."

That evening, after dinner, Rodney Fox came in to bring a book which he had promised to lend to

Isabel. "How is Meta getting on with her rehearsing?" he asked.

"Splendidly, I think," Isabel replied. "Miss Henderson let me watch them, two or three times, and I thought Meta did finely."

"She made a great hit, last year, you know," said Rodney. "Everybody thought she had a lot of talent."

"Of course she has; but it's the real self behind it that makes it worth while," remarked Isabel.

"She is all right, isn't she?" Rodney had always been pleased over the friendship which had sprung up between the two girls. "I thought you would like each other when you got acquainted."

"We stood off for a long time," said Isabel, recollecting the distrust and antagonism with which she had regarded Meta, and the half-spiteful teasing way in which Meta had made things unpleasant for her.

"Girls are awfully snippy," announced Rodney, as if he were reporting a law of nature which he himself had discovered.

"I'm afraid they are," admitted Isabel humbly. "They are always so frightened lest some one shouldn't be quite so good as they consider themselves."

"They lose a lot by it, too." Rodney could not quite keep a tinge of condemnation out of his voice.

Isabel agreed again. "I know they do. But as for me," she confided to Rodney's ear, "I don't believe I'll ever be so unmitigatedly snippy again." The long word seemed to give her speech an extra flavor of repentance.

"I don't believe you will." Rodney nodded his approval as he took himself off.

During the days which followed, Isabel found her relations with Meta becoming more complicated, in spite of — or perhaps because of — the good intentions of both.

One afternoon, for instance, they were coming home from a matinée, to which Meta had invited Isabel, and had stopped to look in at a shop window. It displayed a tempting array of fripperies, in the way of women's apparel.

"Jefferson is becoming very gay and gorgeous," said Isabel, looking with longing eyes at the pale-pink silk garments, trimmed with lace, and ornamented with blue ribbons and tiny chiffon rose-buds.

"Yes, those are attractive things," said Meta, critically examining a billowy negligée.

"Oh, dear! I just love pretty things like that," complained Isabel, who had a passion for daintinesses of all sorts. "I want so many of them, and they cost so terribly much. Cousin Eunice wanted to get me a lot of them in Paris, but I wouldn't let her. She'd done so much for me, you know. And now these —"

"Not bad," said Meta briefly. She could have as many pale-pink silk frivolities as she wanted.

"And, oh, look at the Georgette blouse — the one with the hand-work and the filet lace in the front. That's sweet, isn't it?"

"Very. Did you notice," asked Meta slowly, as the girls resumed their walk, "the blue taffeta dress with the rose-and-gold trimmings, that was in the

case by the door, when we were in at Keeley's yesterday?"

"Did I notice it?" cried Isabel. "Do you think I'm stone-blind? I simply ached for it."

"Now, see here, Isabel," said Meta, turning suddenly and decisively to her companion. "There is something awfully fascinating about these frilly things. I have lots of money to spend — more than I need. Won't you let me —?"

"Oh, Meta, really —" broke in Isabel, looking a trifle scared, "it's tremendously good of you, but honestly I couldn't —"

"Why not?" Meta had taken on an imperious air, almost aggressive.

"I don't know exactly why." Isabel wrinkled her forehead dubiously. "My instinct is against it. It would seem —" She hesitated, looking sidewise at Meta.

"Well, how would it seem?"

"Oh, just sort of — I don't know, but as if I were working you — as if I wanted to get something out of you."

"But we both know that isn't true." Meta had the proud lift to her head which Isabel both admired and feared.

"Of course we do, but —"

"Haven't you taken things when Mrs. Everard gave them to you?"

"Lots of things — yes. But even there, there's a limit. And then — she's one of the family."

"Can't I — be one of the family?" Meta spoke sadly, as if she were hurt.

Isabel took hold of her friend's arm. "Of course, of course," she stammered. "But —" That seemed to be the only word she could think of, and she stopped at that.

"In some ways, but not in others, I see," said Meta, still in the sad tone. "Well, let's not say anything more about it, if you feel like that."

Isabel did not say anything, though she was accusing herself of clumsiness and a show of ingratitude.

The next afternoon, which was a rainy one, Isabel was in her room, when Meta came over for a call. She brought with her a very handsome satin knitting-bag, which she sometimes carried, though the spectacle of Meta knitting was always amusing to her friends.

Meta curled up on the foot of the bed. Isabel was very delicately polishing her finger-nails with a chamois-skin. After the two had talked in a desultory way for a while, Meta said carelessly, "Oh, I brought along a little something for you. I mustn't forget it." She began to fumble in her bag.

"What is it?" asked Isabel innocently, laying down the chamois-skin.

"A tiny present." Meta took out a parcel wrapped in tissue paper. A blush of pink showed through the paper, and an edge of lace peeped out. "Not much of anything."

Isabel opened the parcel on the bed. It contained a pink silk petticoat, exquisitely made, with garlands of lace and touches of ribbon and rose-buds. "Oh, it's lovely!" cried Isabel blankly. "But you're not giving it to me, are you?"

"Of course, Idiot Child. What else did you

think?" Meta was elaborately unconscious of the fact that there had been any discussion of "frilly things" as presents.

"Oh, but you shouldn't," Isabel protested.

"Can't I give you a harmless little gift, if I choose?"

"Theoretically, yes. But—"

"I've heard that word enough," interrupted Meta with humorous firmness. "It's taboo. It's a sweet thing, isn't it?" She took up the ruffle of the skirt, and examined it, so as not to have to meet Isabel's eyes.

Isabel caressed the shell-pink silk. It was just the sort of thing that she "adored." "It's darling," she whispered. The beauty of the garment had won her over. She had forgotten the word *but*. "I can't begin to thank you, Lady Clara," she said, as if she feared she had not been quick enough with her thanks. "I do think it's no end kind of you."

"Don't bother about thanks," responded Meta. She looked gratified when she was sure that her gift was accepted. "I want to say," she continued hurriedly, "that I ordered the Georgette blouse for you."

"Oh!" Isabel gasped with ecstasy and reproach.

"And the blue taffeta." Meta's tone was studiously careless. "They'll be up here to-morrow forenoon."

"*Meta!*" Isabel was nonplussed. "I—I don't know what to say. You overwhelm me," she said at last.

"I insist on your having them," Meta answered.

She had a slightly dominating air, in spite of the affectionate generosity which her face displayed. "I love to give them to you. You look so nice in pretty clothes. I feel as if I had a younger sister to 'doll up,' as the boys say. It's such a pleasure to me; and you know it doesn't deprive me of anything."

Isabel went to the window and looked out at the dripping rain, the mud in the street, the bending boughs of the trees. A farmer was going by, hunched up on his wagon-seat; two girls passed, walking under one umbrella, which exposed first one flower-decked hat and then the other to the downpour; a dog trotted gloomily along with his tail down.

"All right, Meta," said Isabel after her cogitating silence. "I'll keep them if mother says I may. Thank you ever and ever so much. It's lovely of you — it's dear. I can't begin —" She was ready with her thanks again.

"I don't want to be thanked," reiterated Meta fretfully. "I just *want to give you the things!*"

"Very well. I shouldn't know how to express my gratitude anyway. But I'll try to look my best when I wear them."

"That's saying a good deal," said Meta, who appeared well content with the way in which things had turned out.

After Meta had gone, Isabel took the petticoat over her arm, and went to her mother's room. Mrs. Carleton was reading *Walden,* which she always read through at this time in the spring.

"Mother, gaze on this!" Isabel spread out the

pink-and-white flounces, in all their delicacy of rose-bud and garland.

Mrs. Carleton lowered her book. "Oh, it's beautiful, child." Her eyes were full of amazement, mingled with chiding. "But you must have squandered all your allowance at one fell swoop. Don't you think that was rash?"

"No, Muzzy. I don't believe my whole allowance would much more than buy this. Meta gave it to me."

"That was kind of Meta," said Mrs. Carleton in a puzzled way, as she fingered the trimming of the skirt. "Isn't it rather too generous of her?"

"Well, but — mother —" Isabel felt guilty, she hardly knew why.

"Yes?"

"She's ordered a Georgette blouse for me, too — one I liked, down at the Silk Shop."

"A blouse, too?" Mrs. Carleton looked up quizzically. "You didn't *hint,* did you, Flora MacFlimsey?"

"Oh, mother, no! Not that I was aware of. We were just looking at it, and I said I liked it. One may say that, I should think."

"One ought to be allowed to." Mrs. Carleton was smiling perplexedly.

"And —" Isabel found it hard to say the rest: "She's ordered a blue taffeta dress — the sweetest thing, with rose-and-gold-and-jade-green embroidery on it, and gold fringe on the sash — perfectly stunning." Isabel's cheeks were red with the remembered and anticipated glory of the gown. "We saw it together, and I didn't say a *word* about it.

I didn't even think she noticed it — and then to-day she ordered the dress sent to me."

Mrs. Carleton stared. "A taffeta dress!" she echoed. "Well, well! Meta is a generous girl. But how do you feel about taking such things from her?" The face of the lady showed that she herself felt disturbed and uncertain.

"At first I refused to take anything from her, and told her that it wasn't right for her to give me things," Isabel explained. "But she said she loved to do it, and begged me to take 'em. What do you think about it, Mumsey?" The girl's hands were moving over the soft pink silk while she spoke.

"Do as you like, my child," Mrs. Carleton replied. "It's your problem, you know. It seems churlish not to accept gifts kindly meant, that don't deprive any one else. And yet —"

"Yes, and yet —?"

"It won't impair your friendship, will it?"

"I don't see how it can," answered Isabel, as if she had already gone over all the arguments.

"Well, dear, go ahead and do what seems wise to you." The smile with which Mrs. Carleton accompanied her words was an assurance that she was not predicting evil.

"I do want the dress," the girl sighed yearningly. "It's too pretty for words."

"If it makes you happy, take it." Mrs. Carleton was seeking her place in *Walden* again.

Isabel went back to her room and laid the skirt away in a sweet-scented dresser-drawer, among her very choicest bits of adornment. The joy of possession was rapidly destroying all doubts about the

wisdom of accepting the attractive things for which she longed.

The box was in Isabel's room at noon the next day, when she came home from her classes. She said nothing about it, but after luncheon she ran up to try on the new garments. The filmy blouse folded back gracefully from the white girlish throat, and gave the wearer a charm which even her self-deprecating eyes could not deny.

"I'll get so much good out of this for half-dressy occasions," she said to herself exultingly. She could scarcely take off the blouse, even to replace it by the greater splendor of the gown.

The dress came rustling out of its folds of tissue paper, and hung from her hand in all its perfection of flounce and embroidery and gold-fringed sash. Isabel slipped it on, rejoicing in the smooth stiffness of the silk, and the aroma of newness which it exhaled. She hooked it up hurriedly, twisting about before the glass, in order to catch every effect. It was immensely becoming,— just as she felt sure it would be. It seemed as if it were made especially for her.

She put on her Venetian lace collar, and pinned it with the big jade brooch that Madame Doret had given her. The color of the jade setting matched certain green tones in the embroidery. Isabel drew a long breath of satisfaction. Then she called her mother to come and look.

"Oh, my dear! It assuredly is lovely." Mrs. Carleton could not restrain her enthusiasm when she saw the elegant figure standing before the glass, the slender shape and bright golden hair enhancing

the real beauty of the gown. "It's almost too rich for a school-girl; but then, it's simple, too, and the lines are excellent — very reserved, and yet stylish." She was going over it point by point.

"It's just the thing for afternoon affairs, isn't it?" said Isabel, peering over her shoulder to see just how the folds fell in the back of the skirt. "Some of the sorority girls dress so well, mother, that this won't be out of place at all."

"It has an air," conceded Mrs. Carleton. "It's the kind of dress that would make any one feel comfortable, anywhere."

"I never could send it back, now, after we've seen how nice it is — could I?" Isabel was on the defensive against any scruples which her mother might still retain.

"The sleeves are a trifle too long," said Mrs. Carleton non-committally. She was willing that the girl should make her own decisions. "They could be shortened here at the cuff."

Isabel was glad that she did not have to explain the dress to Fanny until she had become better accustomed to it herself.

She wore it to a Pi Phi reception the very next afternoon. Meta had been busy with rehe . . sals, and had not come over; but she telegraphed her approval by the eyebrow method, when Isabel walked into the room at the Pi Phi lodge. Isabel felt a sudden misgiving. She was, unexpectedly to herself, nervous and self-conscious in feeling Meta's gaze fixed upon her.

Several of the college girls crowded around Isabel, to whisper how *dear* she looked in the new gown,

and how perfectly the lace and the jade pin went with it. Isabel, answering them with light parrying jokes, had an uneasy sensation, for she knew that Meta could not help hearing bits of the conversation.

"You never got that in Jefferson, did you?" "I know where you got it, for I saw it down at Keeley's. I wanted it frightfully, but I couldn't afford it." "You couldn't have picked out a more becoming frock." These were some of the remarks which Isabel heard, and which, harmless as they were, gave her a twinge of discomfort.

"I feel somehow as if I had taken the dress out of Meta's wardrobe," she said to herself. "I wonder why I feel so queer about it?"

Meta came over and said, "You look as sweet as a peach, Isabel," and then began to talk about other things before Isabel could answer. While they were talking Meta looked at her friend with an unconsciously gratified air.

"I know," said Isabel again, within her own heart. "I feel as if I were a doll that Meta had dressed up for a bazaar. I had no idea it would be like this. I suppose I'm horrid and ungrateful, but I'm not half so happy as I expected to be."

Bertram Dodge sauntered up just then, open admiration expressed upon his handsome cynical face, and Isabel had a long talk with him, which she afterward recollected to be chiefly about himself. And then Mrs. Mitchell and Madame D'Albert stopped to tell her about the clever tricks of their respective youngsters, incidentally remarking that she looked "adorable" and "*charmante.*"

Isabel was sorry that Rodney was not there; the

throes of mechanical drawing which had to be completed by a certain date were absorbing all his time and attention. But young Professor Sothern brought her ice cream, and talked a while with her about her trip to Europe. In the general gayety of the assemblage and the conversation, she forgot her strange qualms about the gown.

Later, she had an uncomfortable quarter of an hour with Fanny, who broadly hinted at vanity and toadying (a hateful word, Isabel thought), but who grudgingly admitted that the dress was not altogether repulsive in its appearance.

And then on Monday, a hat was sent up, a coquettishly tilted gray straw, with dull-pink velvet roses and green buds, which just matched the embroidery on the dress. Isabel groaned when she saw it, but succumbed to its charm when she had once put it on her head. She attempted to thank Meta and to protest against receiving any further bounty, but was repressed with a firm hand.

On Wednesday she found another parcel in her room. It proved to contain a pair of high light-colored leather shoes, such as were then considered the acme of style and good taste. Isabel had yearned for some, and her heart leaped when she beheld them; but it sank again when she remembered the problem which they presented.

"I might send them back," she meditated, as she stared at the shoes lopping against each other on the dresser, where she had carefully placed them. "But Meta would be hurt and cross, and I don't want to wrangle with her." When she went over to Meta's rooms that night, she broached the sub-

ject of the shoes. "Oh, Meta, dear, you shouldn't," she cried almost pleadingly. "It isn't good for me to have you do so much!"

Meta silenced her with an imperious gesture. Isabel thought of the "barbaric princess" of their earlier acquaintance. "I love to do it," Meta said with willful sternness. "I insist on giving you what I choose."

"It's lovely of you," faltered Isabel, as she had at other times tried to make her replies appropriately grateful.

"She almost acts as if I belonged to her," complained Isabel, still communing with herself, as she walked home after the interview with Meta. "It seems as if she wanted to dominate me." And then she felt ashamed of herself, for a carping hard-hearted wretch, too selfish and clumsy either to refuse a gift gracefully or to appreciate rightly the generosity which prompted it. "I've got myself into a shocking muddle," she sighed. "And I'm afraid it was my vanity that did it."

She was ashamed to go to her mother for comfort, after the responsibilities which she had taken upon herself in the matter of Meta's gifts. She found herself wearing the new clothes as little as possible, because of the undefined sense of humiliation that went with them when she put them on.

CHAPTER VIII

FRIENDSHIP IMPERILED

ISABEL was coming home from a very formal luncheon at the home of Mrs. Hylas, a wealthy woman, who made herself a power, both in the University and in town. The young women who had been invited to the luncheon were an especially smart group, and Isabel, as she walked down Langdon Street, was glad, in spite of her perplexities, that her clothes had made a good appearance. She was even now conscious of a look of respectful admiration in the eyes of the people whom she met on the street.

She was wearing the blue silk gown, with its subdued richness of trimming; the little tilted hat, which set off the dress to perfection; the light shoes; and a marabout scarf and white kid gloves, part of last year's European purchases. As she walked along, she noticed how brilliant the tulips were on the lawns which she was passing, and resolved to have more tulips in her own garden next year. Then she heard a familiar whistle, and looked up to see Rodney Fox hurrying across the street to join her.

He fell into step beside her, and they went on, talking about gardens and tulips for a few moments, until Rodney, turning to Isabel impulsively, said, "Do you know, lady, you rather overwhelm me. You look like a princess or something."

"Your words are vague but pleasing," Isabel returned with a dimple showing at the corner of her mouth.

"That's a gorgeous rig you have on," Rodney continued.

"*Rig,* indeed!" his companion answered teasingly. "Don't you think it deserves a better name than that?"

"Well, costume, raiment, apparel, garb, habiliments, toilette — take your choice. Mere Man wouldn't know the right word, anyway, but believe me, he gets the idea."

"I hope *toilette* is the right word, if the French would think it harmonious enough for that," Isabel responded.

"They'd be dippy if they didn't. I don't know that I dare walk on the same side of the street with you." As a matter of fact, Rodney was looking very well himself in a new gray twilled suit.

"You needn't be afraid," said Isabel absently. Her face was downcast. "It bothers me," she said at last, as if she could not refrain from speaking.

"What bothers you — my suit, or walking on the same side of the street with it?" Rodney inquired with some curiosity.

"Neither. This *rig* is what I refer to."

"Why? It certainly makes you look beautiful, Isabel." Rodney's earnestness left no doubt as to the impression which the *toilette* had made.

"I don't care if it does," was the rash rejoinder.

"But why? I thought girls just reveled in having a lot of becoming clothes."

Isabel felt moved to confide in Rodney. One

could tell him almost anything, and he was pretty sure to understand.

"These clothes worry me, as I said before," she burst out, "because I feel like the jackdaw dressed up in the feathers of the peacock."

Rodney looked astonished. "I don't understand. Aren't they your own? They look as if they belonged to you." Rodney gave the garments in question a comprehensive glance.

"Yes, I suppose they do. They were given to me," Isabel answered.

"Aren't most of your things given to you — I mean, either the money or the things themselves? You don't earn 'em yourself, do you?"

"No, of course not. I have to take things from my family — so far. I hope to be independent very soon —"

"*Do* you?" muttered Rodney.

Isabel went on with dignity, not deigning to notice the interruption. "But Meta gave me these, Rod."

"Oh," said Rodney quickly. He broke off a twig from a tree that hung over the sidewalk, and crumbled the bit of wood thoughtfully as he walked along.

Isabel seemed to be waiting for him to speak. "Your tone implies that that alters the case."

"Why — no — I don't see why it should." Rodney was careful to keep his voice from expressing any very serious conviction.

"Neither do I, exactly. But it's strange how 'beholden' I feel toward her. I'm uneasy and uncomfortable. It isn't her fault. She's perfectly

sweet and generous about it. But it worries me; it's making me miserable."

"Why?" Rodney asked, as if he were a consulting physician.

"I don't know." Isabel was confused and puzzled. And then she had an inspiration. "But suppose, for instance, that George Burnham should want to give you a new suit of clothes and a silk hat and a cane."

"Ha!" cried Rodney involuntarily.

"I thought so," breathed Isabel.

"I didn't say anything," Rodney defended himself.

"No, but I got it just the same."

"Have it your own way."

"I see that it's spoiling our friendship. It's always been so — so *right;* never any wrangling, or any stupid questions of give-and-take. And now I begin to feel inferior and dependent, and at the same time I hate myself for ingratitude. It's destroying the freedom between us. And it seems so queer."

"I've noticed," said Rodney thoughtfully, "among the fellows, that as soon as any question of money or patronage crept in, friendship sneaked out."

"I can see how that would be," Isabel replied.

"And I suppose girls are just the same as fellows in their instincts about such things," Rodney remarked.

"They should be. This talk has cleared my mind." Isabel spoke with decision. "No more

of this Lady Bountiful business — much as I love pretty things. They aren't worth sacrificing a friendship for." And then she added apprehensively, "Do you think I can make that clear to Meta?"

"I don't see why not. She has a lot of sense."

"Yes, and sensitiveness, too."

"Very few of us have rhinoceros' hides, I notice."

"Alas, yes!"

"I wouldn't want one, myself." Rodney was leaving Isabel, in front of the Carleton house. "I'm coming over to-morrow to see how your garden grows, Mistress Mary."

"Do. Everything is springing up beautifully."

"Good-by." Rodney raised his hat, with a backward glance.

"Good-by."

Isabel went into the house with a firm resolve to "straighten things out with Meta," as soon as she conveniently could.

The days thereafter were full of activity, and every moment seemed to be occupied. There was the unceasing push of lessons to be prepared, notebooks to be "written up," papers and reports and themes to be handed in at certain dates, translations to be made, meetings and committees to attend. Then there was the garden to be looked after; and the usual home tasks had to be accomplished. Sprinkled in between the hours of work were amusements of one sort or another. Isabel saw Meta every day, either by chance or appointment, but for

some time there did not seem to be an appropriate time for broaching the subject of Lady Bountiful. Isabel had a pang of apprehension every time she saw a dry-goods delivery wagon approaching the house. "I must get it over before anything else happens," she said to herself.

Late one afternoon, George and Rodney, and Isabel and Meta took lunch baskets and went across the lake in a public launch, to have a picnic. When George proposed the excursion, the evening before, Isabel agreed light-heartedly enough, and entered gayly into the plans for preparing the lunch and meeting at the dock. She was too busy during the day to think much about the matter; but, as the time came near, it became more and more a horror to think of going out upon the water. She had not been on the lake since the time of her great tragedy, a year and a half before.

Nevertheless, she forced herself to go down to the dock at Angleworm Station,—"such an appetizing place to start from, for a picnic," as George had observed. The others were waiting when she arrived, and the steamer was at the wharf, almost ready for its regular trip to the other side of the lake.

When the whistle blew, Isabel clutched Meta's sleeve. She was saying under her breath, "Oh, I can't go, I can't go!" It seemed as if an iron chain were round her feet.

"Oh, Isabel," said Meta in an amazed tone, "you aren't going to back out, are you?"

"I think I'll have to." Isabel had grown limp and unsteady, and her face was very pale.

"That's too bad," cried Meta accusingly. "What are the rest of us going to do?"

The whistle blew again, with three short blasts, to show that the time was short. Still Isabel shrank back. Then she turned sharply, as if to run away. George had gone aboard with the baskets, and Rodney was waiting to help the girls. George stood tense, watching the little drama on the dock. His cap was drawn down over his abundant red-brown hair, and his blue eyes were questioning and sympathetic. Meta gave him a glance of despair.

Rodney stepped to Isabel's side. "Go on, Meta," he said authoritatively. Meta went reluctantly, and stepped into the launch, assisted by a hand from George. Rodney very calmly put his hand under Isabel's elbow. Isabel turned her white face toward him.

"I can't go," she whispered.

"Now, Isabel," said Rodney, in a low voice, which had a sternly compelling quality in it, "it's time you got over this nonsense. You mustn't make a spectacle of yourself. It's up to you to show your good sense."

"I — I'm afraid I haven't any, Rod," Isabel answered weakly.

"Yes, you have!" Rodney's authoritative manner was not to be resisted. "You have too much sense to spoil everybody's fun, and cast a blight over yourself as well. Come on. Don't give in to your emotions. It's childish — and selfish at that."

Isabel gave him a frightened look. She had never heard Rodney speak in that way before. She seemed to wake as from a bad dream. With quick

resolution, she ran forward, Rodney beside her, and leaped over the edge of the boat, which was almost on a level with the dock. The owner of the launch, who had been busy with the engine, now sounded a last warning *toot* on the whistle and took the wheel for departure. The four young people simultaneously drew a long breath, as they settled themselves on the leather seats around the stern of the boat. All at once, with the rapid readjustment of youth, they began to chatter and laugh, as if nothing had happened.

As the launch sped away from the dock, Isabel found to her surprise that all her fear and shrinking had gone. She looked with the remembered ecstasy at the shining blue lake, the long curving white line of the further shore, the woods beyond — pale-green, mellowed by a thin mist of blue. The fresh wind touched her face, and brought back the color to her cheeks.

Then she found that Rodney was speaking, under cover of a lively conversation between Meta and George. "You'll have to forgive me for being so hard with you," he was saying uncomfortably. "It seemed to be the only way to rouse you out of the state you were in."

"It's all right, Rod." She looked at him gratefully. "You did the very best thing. I was childish and selfish. And I'm not going to be so, any more." She thrilled with a sense of exultation in the triumph which they two had made over painful memories and sickly emotions. The rest of the trip was as harmonious as one could wish.

But complications were to come.

The lunch was a very gay one, eaten as the four sat about a grassy space, sheltered by rocks and a fallen tree, over which a vine was climbing. The food disappeared to the accompaniment of the jolliest sort of banter, which was prolonged till after the baskets had been re-packed and set aside.

"I'll bet we could get ice cream cones, over there at the pavilion," said George, indicating a rough booth which stood at some distance down the shore.

"Too early in the season, don't you think?" asked Rodney lazily.

"Let's walk over and see," George suggested. "It's pretty bad walking through the brush and over the stones. The girls can stay here, and talk us over while we're gone. Or do you prefer to discuss the styles?"

"We'll find something to keep us from regretting your absence too keenly," laughed Isabel. She had a happy thought. "Now is a good time to have that talk with Meta. Everything is peaceful. She's in good humor, and so am I."

When the young men had gone, the two girls sat for a few minutes, watching the sunset colors creeping along the water. Then Isabel said in as careless a tone as she could command, "Meta, dear, I've been having solemn communings with myself."

"Is that so?" said Meta absently. "What's it all about?"

"Not about shoes and ships and sealing-wax," answered Isabel, "but about shoes and hats and blue silk dresses."

"Those are silly things to commune about," replied Meta suspiciously.

"Not altogether," Isabel made response. "Now, Meta," she went on firmly, "please, please don't think me ungrateful,—"

Meta turned away impatiently. "Oh, come, Isabel," she interrupted. "I don't want to hear about the writhings of your New England conscience. I want to tell you something funny that happened while we were rehearsing yesterday."

"I know all about that. Olive Sellers told me this morning. Listen —"

"Well, what is it, if I must hear it?" Meta gave grudging attention.

"It's about shoes and hats and petticoats, as I before remarked."

"What about 'em?"

"I can't, I just can't have you giving me things, Meta." Isabel was speaking very fast, to get the ordeal over. "Can't you see that it's spoiling our friendship? (Oh, dear, that wasn't what I meant to say," she thought.)

Meta stared coldly. "No, I am not aware of it. And if it's spoiled, it isn't the clothes that did it, I'm sure."

"Oh, I didn't say it was spoiled," Isabel explained hastily. "I meant it might be, if we kept on."

"It's all the same," said Meta. She had a hurt, surprised expression on her face. "I thought — I had the boldness to think — that we were good friends. Was I mistaken?"

"No, no, of course not." Isabel was bitterly regretting her stupidity in opening the discussion. "We are good friends. I meant, we're such good

friends that it seems a pity to let anything so insignificant as a pair of shoes come between us."

Meta was apparently far from pleased with the word *insignificant*. "I thought you'd like them," she said reproachfully. "They were the nicest they had at Austin's."

Isabel was hideously uncomfortable. "Oh, dear! Why does she make it so hard for me?" she thought. "They're lovely shoes," she said aloud, with tears in her eyes. "Too lovely. I feel sure that I ought not to take such things from you."

"Why not?" Meta was colder than ever.

"I've told you. Because it makes me miserable," Isabel answered. "I feel so — so inferior."

"I shouldn't think you'd allow yourself to have such feelings." Meta's voice had a quiver in it which almost suggested contempt.

Isabel swallowed hard. "Anyhow, I do." She was going on hopelessly. "It seems as if, no matter what I said, I weren't acting grateful enough —"

"Did I act as if *I* expected you to be grateful?" Meta was very lofty now.

"No, no! but I felt —"

"My dear, you're 'morbidly introspective,' as your mother says. Spare me, I beg of you."

Isabel wondered whether Meta were right. She had now lost all perspective on the subject. But she floundered on. "Now, Lady Clare, you know it isn't morbidly introspective to want to maintain one's self-respect." There was a choke in her throat. "You know perfectly well that I love the things you give me, and love you for giving them, but —"

"*But!* That seems to be almost the only word

in your vocabulary, Isabel." Meta picked up a pebble and threw it into the water with a splash.

"It isn't," said Isabel desperately. "I can't accept clothes from you, Meta,— not anything so personal —"

"Very well." Meta was elaborately calm and polite. "You don't need to. Henceforth you shall not be troubled."

"Oh-h!" Isabel sank back despairingly.

Just then the boys came crashing through the underbrush, from the direction of the pavilion. Each carried two ice cream cones, carefully protected from the sweeping hazel bushes. "Hooray!" called Rodney. "Here comes the hokey-pokey man."

The young men were innocently beaming as they approached with the luscious cones, heaped with pink ice cream which was beginning to drip over the edges of the pastry. The girls, too recently wrested from their hot discussion, stared at Rodney and George nervously and gave them only a languid reception.

"Oh, that's fine," said Isabel feebly, and then turned away to dab her eyes with her handkerchief. Meta, her cheeks brilliantly red and her head very high, glanced witheringly at the dribbling cones, and continued to toss pebbles into the water.

The young men stared at each other with a wild surmise. George framed a noiseless question over the heads of the girls. "What's up?" he queried voicelessly, with active lips.

Rodney shrugged his shoulders and sent back a wireless "Search me!" There was an embarrassed

silence. Then Rodney began to expostulate. "See here, girls, don't you want some of these cones, after we've toiled through the wilderness to find 'em?" he asked, in the tone of the male person whose best efforts are unappreciated by incomprehensible females.

Isabel held up her hand for one, and took it with a formal "Thank you." She began to nibble at it with no show of zest.

"I don't care for any," said Meta coolly. Another pebble made a frog-like leap into the water.

"Don't want any! Oh, say, now," complained George. "Rod and I can't eat these. We each had one at the counter." He gazed helplessly at the cones in his hands.

"I'm sorry," answered Meta. "But I ate so much lunch, I don't want anything else."

"Well, all right, *all* right." George tossed a cone into the lake, where it floated, dyeing the water around it an oily pink. He laid the remaining cone down upon a rock, while he wiped his hands with his handkerchief. He and Rodney made hopeless gestures to each other behind the girls' backs.

Rodney took out his watch. "The steamer'll be here in fifteen minutes," he said musingly. "And then there's another, an hour after that."

"Oh, let's take the next one that comes," cried Isabel eagerly. "I'm awfully tired. I've been working like mad lately. I sat up till twelve last night, to finish a theme, and I have a history report to hand in to-morrow, and —"

"I guess those are reasons enough," remarked

George gravely, but he winked furtively at Rodney. The young men went on eating their ice cream cones, in the midst of a silence which had grown almost ghastly.

Isabel was thinking wretchedly. "I suppose our friendship is ruined. And I'm not going to blame Meta, either. It was my fault for being so frivolous in the first place. I dare say that's what father means when he quotes,

> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us.

I never saw any meaning in it before."

With a great effort, she made a comment on the sunset and the sail-boats across the lake. George and Rodney answered with reckless enthusiasm, glad to have a semblance of gayety restored. Gradually Meta was drawn into the conversation; and by the time the boat arrived, they were making a show of hilarity, almost equal to that which picnics demand. But it was a very hollow hilarity, after all. They were the only passengers on the launch, and could not hide behind the merry-making of others.

When they arrived at Angleworm Station, the dusk had fallen, and lights were twinkling up the hill from the lake. Isabel and Rodney walked together, and the others followed, saying very little. "I hope you're not too tired," ventured Rodney. He had noticed that feminine fretfulness and moroseness could usually be excused on the plea that the lady was "tired enough to drop."

"Oh, no. I'm all right," answered the girl.

She did not feel like explaining to Rodney that she had followed his advice, and "had it out" with Meta.

The other three left her at her house, and walked on, with a hurried good-night. Isabel did not go into the house. She sank down on the steps, and huddled up against a pillar, where last year's vines made a shadow. Tears dripped down her cheeks.

"Meta and I did — do — love each other," she thought, "and it does seem too dreadful to have things all go to smash like this. And over nothing, too," she added. "Friendships usually go to smash over nothing. I wonder why that is?" She heard Fanny calling to her mother, inside the house, and later the scraping of Fanny's violin, producing a monotonous succession of exercises. Still the tears came. Isabel abandoned herself to the luxury of self-pity and regret.

After a while she was aware of some one coming along the street toward the house — some one whom she thought she knew. The form hesitated, and then came forward up the walk. Isabel, shrinking into the shadows, made herself as invisible as possible. The other came on. "It's Meta!" she thought, with a swift stab of wonder. "What does she want?"

Meta was almost upon the disconsolate shape leaning against the pillar, before either spoke. The older girl drew back in alarm, and then whispered, "Isabel, is that you?"

"Y-yes." Isabel could not quite control her voice.

"What are you sitting here for?" Meta seemed

to be at a loss for something to say. Isabel could not see her face.

"I couldn't go in. I felt too — too unhappy." Tears were on Isabel's cheeks again.

"So did I." Meta sat down on the steps. "I suppose our friendship has all gone to bits," she said in a resigned tone.

"I suppose so," Isabel replied mournfully.

"I had to see you," Meta said after a minute, during which Isabel used her handkerchief freely. "I scudded right back here, after the boys left me. I wanted to tell you —" She broke off, as if expressing herself were impossible.

"What?" Isabel was as encouraging as she could be without appearing too eager.

"That I honestly think you're right," Meta went on hurriedly. "I've got to admit it. I knew all along that what I was doing was pretty sure to spoil things."

"I ought to have known better myself," Isabel interrupted. "I was silly and vain, I'm sure."

"Well, I was obstinate," said Meta. "I took a certain kind of pride in being able to do things for you. I wanted you to look pretty, of course; but I began to feel as if you belonged to me — as if I could dress you up,—'doll' you up, you know I said. It was like having a plaything — a doll that I could deck out with flummeries, just as I chose."

"That shows that I must have been a kind of empty-headed doll, myself," murmured Isabel. She wanted to take all the blame that belonged to her.

"I can see, now," Meta continued, ignoring Isabel's remark, "that I was taking your individuality

away, forcing you to do something just because I wanted it. That's my besetting sin: I want to overpower people, to make them do as *I* wish. And then when you squirmed, I felt injured. I felt savage, even, as if I couldn't do a thing that I wanted to — as if some right that belonged to me were being snatched from me. As a matter of fact, it was just the other way." She paused miserably, in the midst of her self-condemnation.

Isabel felt suddenly light and clear. She began to laugh softly. "How tragic we are, Meta!" she cried, smothering her voice and her mirth. "We're really awfully funny, you know, sitting here in the dark, bemoaning our faults and failings. The whole thing doesn't amount to a row of beans, now, does it?"

"Why — why," Meta stammered, "aren't you hurt and mad and disgusted?"

"Not in the least. Are you?" Isabel felt for the other girl's hand, in the dark.

"No," responded Meta in rather a surprised way, "I don't believe I am. What should I be mad about? I've told you that you were in the right."

"Then it's all settled. We've both proclaimed that we were wrong, and we both see that the simple friendship was better, without any complications." Isabel spoke triumphantly. "We're going to begin all over again. Aren't we?"

"Can we?" asked Meta joyfully.

"Nothing to hinder. And oh, Meta, I do love you for your generosity. Come on in and see

mother." Isabel jumped up from her strained position.

Meta rose, too. "No, it's getting late. I must go home and study. I couldn't till I'd seen you."

A shaft of light from a street lamp fell on the faces of the girls. They looked into each other's eyes, happy and relieved. "Do you know," Meta said awkwardly, "I'm astonished at myself for confessing that I was wrong. I've always been so stubborn, and proud of the fact that I never gave in."

"We both really gave in at once," Isabel reminded her.

"I wouldn't do it for any one but you," concluded Meta. "And haven't any idea that I'll ever be so meek again — no matter what happens." Isabel squeezed her hand without saying anything; but she was hoping that nothing would happen.

The next afternoon, Isabel was crouching low on the ground in the garden, digging up some very persistent weeds around the marigold sprouts, when Rodney and George suddenly stood beside her. "Did you drop from an air-ship?" she gasped, looking up breathlessly, with a trowel in her hand.

"No, not this time," laughed George. "We may be doing it soon. Your mother told us where you were, and we came out quietly, to surprise you."

"You succeeded." Isabel straightened up, and pushed the hair away from her eyes.

"Things get on like a house a-fire," commented Rodney, gazing around the yard with a kind of pride of ownership. "You'll need more help with these weeds."

"So Fanny says," twinkled Isabel. "She expects this to be an impenetrable jungle of pigweed, in about a week — so I judge from her talk."

"We'll fool her," said Rodney warmly.

"May I take a look around?" asked George. "I haven't been in here for some time."

"Surely." Isabel was glad of an opportunity of speaking to Rodney. "Oh, Rod," she went on, "I don't know what you and George must have thought yesterday. First I acted so silly about going on the water, and then Meta and I got into that wrangle while you were after the ice cream cones, and things were simply unspeakable." She looked her distress.

"Oh, well, things can't always go like clockwork," said Rodney forgivingly. "Are they better today?"

"Splendid. Meta and I got everything straightened out last night."

"Last night?"

"Yes. Meta skipped over here as soon as you and George left her, and I was sitting out on the front porch in the dark —"

"Sniffling," said Rodney. "I'll bet you were." His bright eyes searched Isabel's.

"Well — I was. And we had a talk — and, anyhow, things are all right now." She sighed. "That seems to be what life chiefly consists of — getting into muddles, and then muddling out again."

"That's about it, lady," Rodney conceded cheerfully. "At least for us youngsters."

"I'm glad we usually flounder out," said Isabel. She stood pensive with her trowel in her hand.

George was coming back from his stroll about the

garden. "Don't you want to sit down and rest a minute?" he said, motioning toward the rustic bench beside the arbor.

All three sat down on the bench. Isabel took off her gloves and pulled at the fingers thoughtfully.

"Rod and I are trying to settle our destinies," remarked George in his satirical manner, after they had been sitting for a few moments; "for the summer, at least."

Isabel looked from one to the other. "How's that?" she asked.

"We're both yearning for practical experience."

"Oh, yes. Rod said something about it — or one of you, anyway."

"I'm aching to get out and *do* something besides figure and weigh and do experiments in laboratories, and draw lines on paper," exclaimed Rodney, frowning.

"And I'm tired of letters and charts and maps and theories," said Burnham. "Two years of it is all that I can stand."

"You seem to be two souls with but a single thought," said Isabel, glinting a smile at each.

"We are, on this subject. Now, if one could only combine business and pleasure," George continued, "life would be worth while; if, for instance, one could ply his trade under the greenwood tree, and earn his shekels on the bank of a trout-stream!"

"You don't ask anything, do you?" muttered Rodney.

"Why not 'git a-plenty while you're a-gittin'"?" George defended himself. "Especially when you're taking it out in wishes."

"If wishes were — trout, we'd have plenty to fry," interpolated Isabel.

"Unfortunately," Rodney was saying, "one doesn't often manage to combine business and pleasure in just that way, so he has to live without one or the other. It usually happens to be pleasure which he eliminates."

"I don't see why we can't have both," meditated George. "Every human being has a right to honest work and honest enjoyment — about equally divided."

"People in general don't seem to realize that," remarked Isabel.

"No. Some people take all the pleasure and leave the work for anybody who is foolish enough to do it. But the time will come when the balance will be adjusted. People will never get what belongs to them until they realize that it is theirs." George was very serious now.

"Your philosophy is all right," returned Rodney dejectedly. "But how about this summer? We'll probably both of us spend it in some little dark hole of an office, where we can't see anything but a roof or a sandbank."

"You're optimistic, to say the least," George remarked, with disapproval.

"I confess," Rodney said in reply, "I'm down in the mouth just at this particular stage of my career. A fellow gets tired of pegging along at his books and classes, and taking checks from his father, and being petted by his mother, and generally acting the part of Spoiled Darling. He wants to get out and do some scrambling for himself."

"Well, don't get gloomy. There's a lot of time yet before school closes. You'll find a job right to the Queen's taste, if I'm any prophet," consoled George.

"I'm not a bit sure that you are, Burn. But you mean well," granted Rodney.

The conversation lagged. "Did you notice," said Isabel, to fill the gap, "how the beans have come up around the arbor?"

"Yes, I did," said George. "They're fine."

"Let's look at 'em," suggested Rodney.

They went over to look at the bean-plants, which were flourishing about the sides of the small pavilion at the end of the garden. "About the first of July, I think," said Isabel, "they'll begin to burst into bloom, and send out hundreds of red blossoms, and then our arbor will be a thing of beauty and a joy forever — at least till fall."

"I suppose you'll call it the bean-arbor — that's such a poetic name!" commented George.

"Doesn't the Bible say something about a lodge in a garden of cucumbers?" answered Isabel. "This is no more plebeian than that."

"Beans are honorable vegetables," agreed Rodney, "and this climbing kind have gorgeous flowers. They grow like lightning, too, and cover up a multitude of shortcomings — not to mention strings and wire netting."

"That's why I chose 'em," said Isabel. "I couldn't wait for something slower and more sentimental to spring up and cover the bare bones of the arbor."

"All honor to the honorable bean!" cried

George. "Come on, Rod, let's give Miss Carleton fifteen minutes of our valuable time. We'll rout out more weeds than she could dig up with those little white hands of hers in two hours and a half." And so the garden profited by the visit of the young engineers.

Isabel was beginning to feel the strain of the busy life which she was leading. "I feel like a juggler keeping ten plates in the air at once," she complained to Fanny, one evening. Isabel was getting dressed for dinner, and Fanny, already combed and clothed, was sitting on the bed, and swinging her feet.

"What's the matter?" asked the younger sister coolly.

"Why, there are so many things to do. Life is so complicated." Isabel bent over to slip on her white canvas pumps.

"It is a sort of complicated life," admitted Fanny. She went on humming a strain of the *Barcarolle* from the *Tales of Hoffmann.*

"Sometimes I feel as if I can't stand it," Isabel lamented. "I have my studying, and my craft work, and the Fund, and my clothes to see to, and the garden, and all sorts of things to go to — one has to get a little enjoyment out of life —"

> "Mistress Isabel,
> Queer and quizzical,
> How does your garden grow?"

Fanny was chanting derisively.

"I don't think much of your rhyme," said Isabel, knotting her silk sash.

"It'll do," said Fanny cheerfully. "Let me see — *tum-te-tum-te-tum-te tum:* —

> "Bells of blue,
> And asters, too,
> And marigolds all in a row."

"That's too tame," Isabel decided. "It ought to be something of this sort:

> "Daily themes,
> Reports in reams,
> And quiz-papers all in a row."

"Very well, if you prefer that," said Fanny, "but this would be more to the point:

> "Sorority teas,
> And gossiping bees,
> And picnics all in a row."

"Well, as I was saying," Isabel went on, sitting down on the edge of the bed beside Fanny, "I dash from one thing to another till my head whirls. I go ranting around like a wild woman; I'd like to take a few weeks off, and just vegetate."

"Why don't you?"

"I'd look nice, stopping in the midst of the semester, and slumping down in the bean-arbor to take life easy — wouldn't I?"

"What do you care how you'd look?" Fanny tucked a stray lock into place over Isabel's ear.

"Anyhow," exclaimed the older girl with a sudden resolution, "I'll take a week-end off, and go out to Grammy's."

"That's a good idea," said Fanny. "It would

give you a vacation — and the family, too," she added slyly.

"You're horrid, Fan," Isabel pouted.

"I know I am," laughed Fanny. "I just can't help it, when you begin to get fidgety and self-conscious." She kissed her sister quickly and rather shamefacedly on the cheek. "Go on out to Grammy's and become a care-free nymph of spring, or whatever it is you want."

"I'm going to," said Isabel, as the gong sounded for dinner.

On Monday, she met Rodney coming out of the University Library as she was going in. They stopped for a moment's conversation. "I'm going out to Grandmother's for the week-end," announced Isabel happily.

"Oh, now," answered Rodney crossly, "it's mean of you to run away just at the niftiest time of the spring. I thought we could have a picnic out at the University orchard. The apple-trees are in bloom, you know."

"Well, I've written Grammy. And anyway, I want to go," said Isabel.

"Then I'll go, too," said Rodney.

"All right. Come along. Why not?" Isabel looked well pleased.

"I will if your grandmother will let me."

"Of course she will, silly. She has quite a case on you, you know."

"I'm not so sure about that; but I'll write and ask if I may go out and spend Saturday."

"Oh, do, Rod! That would be splendid!"

"Perhaps she'll let me be a warder of the pigs —"

"Or guardian of the bovine herd."

"Or head-waiter for the turkeys. I'll send a letter this afternoon." Rodney was all enthusiasm. "It'll get to her to-morrow morning."

"Call me up when you hear," said Isabel as they parted.

On Wednesday, she was called to the telephone, to hear that Rodney had received a letter saying that he might come. "Of course," rejoined the girl. "I knew you didn't need to ask."

"You're going out on Friday afternoon?"

"Yes."

"I'll run out on Saturday morning — that early train."

"You'll have breakfast with us?"

"Yes, two breakfasts, if you like. I shall be like a starved wolf by the time I get there."

"Grandmother will see that you don't fade away. Saturday morning it is, then."

All the rest of the week Isabel was looking forward to the day to be spent on her grandfather's farm at Dalton, thirty miles away.

CHAPTER IX

AN EVENTLESS DAY

ISABEL was unusually busy on Friday, and it was only by "tearing," as she expressed it, that she was able to get packed and dressed in time to take the street-car for the train. "It costs too much to have a cab," she grumbled. "Gracious! I wish we could have 'em as rashly here as we used to in London. It comes hard to drag one's suit-case around like a porter. I'm glad that afternoon train has been put on. It was awkward, going at eight o'clock at night, or waiting till morning."

Fanny, who was going to the station with Isabel, listened absently. She was just then concerned about the last basket-ball game of the season, which was to take place at the high-school gymnasium that evening. Howard Sutro was to escort her, and there was to be dancing afterward.

When they reached the station, they merely had time to buy a ticket and rush down the long covered platform to the train, which was snorting and puffing impatiently on the track. "It acts as if it had waited for you, and was mad because it had to," remarked Fanny.

"It needn't wait any longer." Isabel gave Fanny a hasty caress. "Good-by, Angel Child. Be as good as you can without Big Sister." She adopted

the patronizingly teasing tone which always irritated Fanny beyond words.

" I got along a year without Big Sis," sniffed the younger girl; " perhaps I can manage for two or three days."

" Don't get into any squabbles with the other children," Isabel continued, while the good looking young brakeman, helping her with her suit-case, cast an amused glance at the indignant Fanny. " Sister'll bring you something when she comes home."

The expression on Fanny's face was so wrathful that the young brakeman exploded frankly into laughter. " You can come to the train alone, next time," called Fanny to Isabel, who was standing on the platform of the car.

The brakeman lifted the step-ladder, and swung himself up to the car. " All aboard," he shouted. He lifted his cap jestingly to Fanny, who turned away with injured dignity.

Isabel found a seat, and looked studiously out of the window, because she did not want to meet the brakeman's eye. She caught sight of Fanny, who was walking stiffly along the station platform, without looking back. Her heart smote her. " But it's so much fun, teasing Fan," she murmured. " You never know just what sensitive spot in her soul you are going to touch. I suppose I may do it once too often, and hurt her feelings so that there will be real trouble. She's as stubborn as Meta, when she's once wrought up. I must be more considerate."

Isabel took out a history book, and studied her lesson for Monday, and ran over the week's lessons in review. " It's a nuisance to have to drag a book

along wherever you go, as if it were a ball-and-chain," she said to herself. She cast wistful eyes out of the window, where the landscape was becoming more and more alluring. The woods were growing shadowy in the late afternoon; farm-steads sent up blue curling smoke, among plum-trees beginning to drop their petals, and apple-trees in full bloom; streams glinted among thin-leafed underbrush; now and then a lake reflected the clearness of the sky.

Grandfather Stuart met the traveler at the station, and whisked her home in his new Ford car, just in time for supper. There was a great deal of laughing and chatting, for Mr. and Mrs. Stuart always wanted to know about everything that concerned the life of their eldest (and, perhaps, dearest) grandchild. "Grampy and Grammy are the most obliging listeners," Isabel was wont to say. "Your smallest remark about your troubles and successes they take in as if it were to settle the fate of nations. And they never let you know how much you bore them."

After supper, she played checkers with Grandfather, who kept up from visit to visit a very elaborate record of games won and lost. There was spirited rivalry on this particular evening, and the results were solemnly entered in a note-book. As the dusk drew on, the three people sat out on the porch in the cool air. They could hear the frogs croaking in the meadows, and the guinea-hens muttering and clucking in the trees at the foot of the garden, where they had settled themselves for the night.

Out in the cow-barns the electric lights were on — for Grandfather had a very modern equipment — and Isabel could see the forms of the hired men as they passed to and fro, doing the evening's " chores." The *whir-r-r* of the separator sounded dully from the milk-house.

Isabel was hoping fervently for good weather on Saturday. " It seems damp, don't you think? " she said anxiously. " Do you think it's going to rain, Grampy? "

" H-mm, no, I don't think so." Mr. Stuart studied the sky for a moment. " It's always a little damp in the evening at this season."

" There's a white mist over the far meadow," ventured Isabel again.

" Oh, well, that's always there. The land's pretty low in that spot."

Grandmother began to shiver, and they were all glad to go inside. There was more talk, and then Isabel went to bed. She was always extraordinarily sleepy on the first night in the country. " Oh, if it's only a nice day to-morrow! " was her last thought as she dropped asleep.

She was awakened by her grandmother, tapping at her door, and pushing it open. Mrs. Stuart came to the side of the bed with a tray on which were a cup of chocolate and two graham crackers. " I couldn't have you start off for the station without a bite and a sup," she said.

" I told Rod not to have any breakfast till he came," hesitated Isabel. " It doesn't seem fair for me —"

" This isn't breakfast," said the crafty grand-

mother; " it's only a swallow — which doesn't make a summer. Rodney will probably have something to eat at the station in Jefferson."

The sun was shining in through the white muslin curtains, and falling in a brilliant square on the counterpane of the four-poster bed. " It's a grand day, isn't it? " exulted Isabel as she drank the chocolate luxuriously.

" Yes, all that you could ask."

Isabel was soon up, and dressing hastily. She was just buttoning her gray spats over her stout ties when she heard the honk of the car. She ran down stairs, pinning on her hat as she went.

" What a sun! and what a blueness! " cried the girl, as her grandfather sped the car out of the yard.

They arrived at the station only a few moments before the train from Jefferson came in. Rodney stepped down upon the platform, his face very happy and lighted with anticipation.

Greetings over, they all went out to where the automobile was standing. " You drive, Rodney," said Mr. Stuart, as they got into the machine. " I know you young chaps like it; I only do it out of a sense of duty."

" Glad to, sir." Rodney took the wheel with an easy grasp.

There was very little said on the way home. Breakfast was being put on the table when they arrived. " I'm as ravenous as a tiger," exclaimed Rodney. " Don't come near me with those biscuits, or I may snap them up, plate and all, and that wouldn't be a nice beginning."

" I like to have my guests hungry, and then they're

not too fussy about what they get," smiled Mrs. Stuart.

"They never get anything here that isn't perfectly sa-lu-bri-ous," Isabel remonstrated. "I don't know what the word means, but it sounds awfully complimentary. When I'm here, I eat in a way that would amaze the hired men. I'm glad they have their own dining room, and don't have to see me make inroads on the food."

They all sat down. The coffee was perfect, the omelette with parsley was thick and savory and plentiful, the fried potatoes were crisp and brown; doughnuts sat temptingly at the side of the table, ready for any one who couldn't eat another bite of anything else.

"It certainly is great to take time to eat, and not have to make tracks for an eight o'clock," said Rodney, when the leisurely meal was over. "Can't we help with the dishes?"

"Mrs. McCauley has to wash and scald the milk-cans," answered Mrs. Stuart, "and so I'm going to look after the dishes. You may help if you want to."

"We do," shouted Rodney and Isabel, beginning to pick up the dishes and carry them to the kitchen. The process of dish-washing was soon going on at a lively rate.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Stuart, "you two people wipe the dishes so fast that I can't begin to keep up with you."

"That's where our trained minds get in their licks," said Rodney. "Nothing like an engineering laboratory as training for skill with the dish-towel."

"Education should be a preparation for life," chuckled Isabel.

"Yes. By the time I've had four years in the Engineering School, I ought to be able to wash and wipe dishes with neatness and dispatch," replied the young man, as he gingerly tried to lift a platter out of the hot water. "Whew! I can't get that out!" He flapped his hand to cool it.

"My stars! I wonder why men have such delicate fingers. They're worse than cats, if anything is the least bit hot." Isabel took the platter from the water, and swirled her towel ostentatiously over its smooth blue sides.

"Women are so patronizing," complained Rodney, standing with his dish-towel limp in his hands. "If they happen to be able to do a thing, they act so set up about it that you feel as if you could crawl into a peanut shell. You never have the sense to think of all the wonderful things you can do yourself. You just think of the thing that they're crowing over you for."

"Then you don't show very good sense," responded Isabel coolly, as she continued to fish saucers and silverware out of the hot rinsing-water. "Men are just like children. If they —"

"Here, here," broke in Mrs. Stuart, looking alarmed. "We can't have any discussions that may carry us too far, and do damage to our friendship."

"You don't know our friendship," Rodney reassured her. "That's discussion-proof. We've given it many a hard test."

"I dare say you have." Mrs. Stuart spoke in a

relieved way. "Well, now, I'll finish up these tins and things. You two run along and enjoy the out-of-doors."

"We don't need to be pushed out." Isabel gave Mrs. Stuart a hug, dish-cloth and all. "Don't expect us back till we come. We're going to ramble about when we feel like it, and sit down and rest when we feel like it, and have the laziest day that any hard-working college grinds ever had."

Isabel went up to her room to wash her hands, and put a net over her hair. She stopped to make the bed, which had been airing since she had hurried away to the station. She put on her green-and-white jersey, and powdered her nose hastily, deciding at the same time not to wear a hat.

When she came down, Rodney, with his hands in his pockets, was whistling on the side porch. They started off together without saying a word.

They went past the big oak trees in the yard, and out to the back of the house. A small fluffy gray kitten dashed into the shelter of the wood-pile when it saw the strangers approaching. "Oh, you sweet thing!" cried Isabel. "Get it for me, Rod. I wonder why Grammy didn't tell me there were kittens?"

"She ought to have a bulletin board announcing social events," murmured the boy, as he got down on his knees and fumbled around under the wood for the shrinking ball of fluff. He brought it out protesting with futile clawings and sputterings. "Well, well, you are a funny little beggar, aren't you?" he laughed as he handed the tiny creature over to Isabel.

She took it and snuggled it up against her cheek, talking to it in baby-talk,—" itty tootsy tunning sweety," and other endearments. It cuddled against her chin and purr-purred contentedly. " I could stay here all day and fuss over the little thing," said Isabel apologetically.

She sat down on the chopping-block, and put the kitten into her lap, while Rodney tantalized it with a grass-blade. It put out a paw and reached daintily for the grass. The mother cat came presently with anxious and interrogative *purrrr-meaouw's* to see what had happened to her baby.

" I suppose I've got to give it up," said Isabel to the cat. " Did you think I was going to kidnap it? "

" Oughtn't the word to be *cat-nap?* " suggested Rodney. " You could kidnap a kid, but you'd have to cat-nap a cat, wouldn't you? "

" I could kit-nap a kit, I suppose," Isabel replied, restoring the child to its mother. " Come on. Let's look at the chickens."

The young chickens were scuttling and " yirp-ing " about in the grass, as if they found the world a very bewildering place. The mother-hen stuck her red head out between the slats of her coop and admonished the rash younglings with nervous clucks.

" She acts just like Mrs. Rausch with her two babies," laughed Isabel. " She is always clucking around in the self-same way."

" She has the same wild eye and the same sharp beak," admitted Rodney. " I never thought of it before."

" I'd be wild-eyed, too, if I had three youngsters

to look after," said Isabel. "Worse than the hen, I am sure."

They went on through the vegetable garden, where the beans were sprouting, with heart-shaped leaves, and where the keen blades of the onions were piercing the dark earth. Then Rodney opened the gate into the orchard.

"Oh, what a day! what a day!" cried Isabel, pausing at the gate.

"It's a day of glory, all right," rejoined Rodney. "Listen! that's a meadow lark."

"What a fresh note. It's like spring itself! And there's an oriole — like a flash of fire."

They went forward into the orchard. The low crooked trees stretched away in rows, bearing the full bloom of the season.

"It's a wonderland of flowers, isn't it?" Rodney spoke in a subdued tone, as if he had no words for what he felt.

"Dreamland," said Isabel. They walked silently on down the avenues of bloom. On the grass were the first fallen petals. The blossoms spread to their fullest, while at the ends of the branches were the round red buds enclosed by furry young leaves.

The odors which mingled with the wind were elusive and delightful. Isabel held up her arms to the swaying boughs. "It seems as if one couldn't love them enough," she said to herself —"as if they would always keep just out of reach." The petals dripping slowly from the trees caught on her hair, and on the lace of her collar. Rodney shook a big branch, and laughed to see the showers of white-and-pink that fell on Isabel's shoulders.

They seemed very far away from any one else. Isabel was all at once aware that Rodney was saying nothing, but that he was looking at her intently. He stood with his arm along the bough, his hazel eyes fixed on her with an eager affectionate gaze, as if he had forgotten everything in the world but her. Speech died away, and she became transfixed, looking back at him with eyes that were clear and startled, as if he had come upon her suddenly under the apple-trees. For a long minute the eloquent interval lasted, and in that time they had said more to each other than they could have said with language during the whole sun-lighted spring day. The moment passed, leaving a warm feeling of understanding which went with them in all the remainder of their wanderings.

"I'm sure the violets are out, in the meadow," said Isabel at last. She flushed, and her eyes remembered to be shy.

Rodney came back to his surroundings. "There must be bushels," he said vaguely. "Shall we go on?"

On the slope beyond the orchard they found violets, purple and long-stemmed, garlanding the grass. On their knees, the two young people, with very little to say, gathered the flowers and leaves, and made a nosegay, which Isabel carried as they went on toward the stream. Willows and thin-leafed poplars edged the river. There was a log bridge, on the edge of which the companions seated themselves, with their feet hanging down over the water. It was fascinating to watch the sliding current. The red and white pebbles and the darting fish

seemed always changing shape and color as the stream flowed over them.

Isabel sighed. "I feel like a different being from the one who has been ranting around like Bosco the Wild Girl for the last few weeks. I got so that I felt I couldn't stand it a minute longer. I don't see why it's necessary to let one's life get so cluttered up. Do you?"

"It's a lot more interesting if it's full of activity," said Rodney. "What do you think you'd make of it if you lived off on the Dakota plains or up on a mountain somewhere, where there was nothing going on at all, and nothing to do but the dishes, day after day?"

"I've sometimes thought I'd like to try it," Isabel answered. "One would get so she either hated the dishes or loved 'em. Oh, Rod! don't you think a summer in the mountains would be too perfectly super-glubious for anything?"

"Oh, a *summer* in the mountains — yes," Rodney replied almost gloomily. "I'd dance like a dervish if I thought I'd have a chance to spend a summer in the real mountains — I shouldn't care if I had to work till I dropped."

"I'd love it, too," Isabel said, playing with the violets in her lap. She was thinking that if she could be in the mountains with a few nice agreeable people, and Rodney were among them, what an ideal time she could have. She sighed again, reflecting that things as good as that weren't likely to happen. If she should go to visit Meta, off there in the West somewhere, Rodney would be hundreds of miles away, learning to be a practical engineer.

"Maybe we'll manage it sometime," said Rodney, as if he had followed her thought. She started, and dropped some of the violets into the water.

Rodney was watching the minnows glinting in the ripples. "One great year we've had, anyway — eh, Isabel?" He gave her a sidelong glance. "It's been pretty scrumptious since that day we got things untangled, out at Kegonsah."

"It didn't seem as if we'd ever get them straightened out, did it?" the girl replied with a retrospective frown.

"Oh, I sort of had faith that we should. Things can't stay messed up forever. Not if people — really —"

His voice trailed off. He leaned forward to inspect a crab scuttling backward among the stones.

"N-no, I suppose not," Isabel agreed. "There's a Something down underneath, that untangles our affairs, no matter what a confusion we get them into."

"We should be thankful for that," said Rodney fervently. After a few minutes, he went on, "I've always felt a little guilty — about Herb."

"Oh — why?"

"Well, you know, you and Herb were awfully congenial — you liked the same things; he understood you better than I do — your thoughts and his kind-of ran along the same lines."

Isabel looked at him with meditative gray eyes. "Of course, in a way, that's true," she answered. Rodney winced. She did not seem to notice. "But that isn't everything," she added.

"No. But it's a good deal. I felt that he had

a right to your society. You and he could have done a great deal for each other, you know."

"But — but he said he wasn't going to be satisfied to be — a nice comfortable friend," explained Isabel, blushing. She had never told Rodney exactly what Herbert Barry had said to her that day last fall in the French section of the Library. "He said that none of us would be satisfied."

"I guess he was right. Herb has a mighty fine instinct about things. He's a splendid fellow. And this is a great experience he's having now."

"Yes. And I hope he will soon be safely back." Isabel always expected, from day to day, to hear that the war was at an end.

For many minutes the two friends sat on the log bridge, talking quietly, with long pauses. The stream bubbled endlessly by, under their feet, the willows bowed in the breeze, the meadow larks called incessantly through the fields. It seemed to Isabel that she had never been calmer or happier or more rested.

After a while they roused themselves, and started back by way of the woodlot, where hickory and oak and poplar trees rose thickly out of the underbrush. Rodney broke off sprays of dogwood as they walked, and Isabel gathered the creamy mandrake blooms, and pink-edged trilliums. They loitered in the path, and watched the squirrels in the trees, and a hawk laboriously building a nest. A crawling turtle distracted them from their course.

In the pasture behind the barn, they lingered to enjoy the antics of a colt, and the stately struttings of a peacock, which appeared to be rapt in a solemn

state of self-admiration. With his great tail spread to the sun, he promenaded to and fro upon the grass, showing off to the best advantage the blue and green and bronze of his feathers; and never losing his dignity, even when the wind upon his expanse of plumage threatened to capsize him.

"Magnificent creature!" said Isabel. "I don't care how vain you are. You are a lovely sight, and no mistake."

"Another picture to take home with us," commented Rodney.

By the time the flowers were revived and arranged, and hands were washed, lunch was on the table. "Our thoughts may be poetic, but our appetites aren't," Isabel confessed. "I shall want a second helping of everything."

After luncheon was over, Rodney called to the others from the doorway, "Come on, all. I'm going to take your pictures." He had brought out his camera from the hall, where he had left it when he arrived.

"Oh, dear," cried Mrs. Stuart,—"and me with this gingham housedress on!"

"Wait, Rodney," said Mr. Stuart, laughing, "until she has put on her new purple silk, and a chain and breast-pin or two."

"I want both of you just as you are," said Rodney. "Come out where the light is good, and get taken."

First he took Grandfather and Grandmother sitting on a rustic bench, and Isabel standing beside them; then all three standing before the syringa bush, which was white with blossoms. Isabel in-

sisted on having the kitten in her arms. Grandfather, with his white beard, and his old felt hat drooping in his hand, looked like a very honorable and prosperous farmer.

"I don't think I adorn a photograph very much," he said whimsically. "I never was much of an ornament, but there was a time when I'd pass for one a good deal better than I do now."

"Oh, Grampy," exclaimed Isabel, "let Rod see the pictures of you when you came out of the Civil War. You were an ornament then. You've never seen 'em, have you, Rod?"

"No, I haven't, but I'd like to, very much," said Rodney, putting his camera on the porch. "May I, Mr. Stuart?"

"Why, if you want to." The old gentleman looked pleased. "Let's see, where are those pictures, Mother? You have them hidden away somewhere."

"They're in the bureau drawer, in the west bedroom."

"Can't I get them?" said Isabel.

"No, I'll go." Mrs. Stuart never liked to have any person other than herself lay a finger on those pictures. She went into the house, and came back with two old card photographs and a daguerreotype. She looked long at them herself, and then put them reluctantly into Isabel's hand.

"How splendid he looks!" murmured the girl, gazing at the portrait of the handsome young man,— with the very new mustache,— in the uniform of the Northern soldier.

"That was taken in Washington, on my way

home," said the old man, indicating the most striking of the pictures. "I wasn't as old as you are, Rodney."

"Goodness! he looks older," said Isabel. But that was because it was so hard to think of Grandfather as being as young as Rodney. He seemed so very ancient now. Could Rodney ever be bent and wrinkled, with a white beard and thin white hair? she wondered.

"And you were in the Civil War!" Rodney was saying. Of course he had known it; but wars, until these last few months, had seemed something impossible and prehistoric. He was looking over Isabel's shoulders at the portraits.

"You were in battle. Oh, Grampy, do you think you —" She was going to say, *ever killed any one?* But a look in her grandmother's eyes made her stop. What an awful question to ask a man. But men in battle did kill other men. That was what they were there for!

Rodney seemed fascinated by the pictures. He took them and held them a long time. "How different the khaki looks," he said. "It's more practical, but this is more picturesque." And then he said in an undertone, "Well, they do come back."

"Yes, they do," said the old man, "but —"

Isabel felt a cold foreboding. The war which had seemed to be just a troublesome affair among a few European nations was creeping closer and closer, like some relentless beast, and before long it would surely spring upon America.

"Can't they settle things in any other way?" she cried, sick at heart.

"They think they can't." Grandfather's face was very grave.

Isabel put her arms around Mr. Stuart's neck. "Grampy, you're lovely in the pictures," she said, "with your pink cheeks and the gilt buttons on your coat, but I like you just as you are." She gave him a kiss on his stubbly cheek. "Let's forget, for to-day, anyway, that there ever were any wars, or that there are ever going to be any!"

"Yes, that's wisest," said Mrs. Stuart, almost sadly. She took the pictures, and went into the house to put them away.

Grandfather went thoughtfully away to superintend some work on the place. Isabel lay for a long time in the hammock, Grandmother sat near in a low chair, sewing, and Rodney stretched himself out in a canvas chair. Sometimes they talked of cheerful things, and sometimes they were silent for long minutes together. It was a quiet, dreamy, happy afternoon, with nothing to mar its placidity.

After dinner, Isabel and Mr. Stuart took Rodney to the station. Grandfather stayed in the automobile while Isabel went to see Rodney off. As the two stood on the platform, Rodney said, "It's been a wonderful little outing for me. I feel somehow as if it had been an event — and not a single thing has happened all day."

"That's just what I've loved about it," answered Isabel —"we didn't have to depend on things happening. It was the quietness — nothing to rush around for, you know — that made me happy." When she was with Rodney, she thought, she did not feel as if she needed exciting events to interest her.

They always had plenty to talk about, and yet they didn't have to talk unless they wanted to.

"It's been perfect, for me," said Rodney, as the train came rushing in. He squeezed her hand, swung himself up to the car step, and disappeared into the still spring night.

Isabel, on the seat with Grandfather, was watching the pale green streak of sky above the horizon, as it faded into blue. From time to time she whispered to herself, "What a heavenly day!"

CHAPTER X

THE DOWNFALL OF CHINA

META HOUSTON lived in two large cheerful rooms, charmingly furnished, not far from the Carleton home. She and Isabel often ran back and forth to see each other. On the Tuesday after her return from the farm, Isabel was in Meta's bedroom; and Meta, refreshing her costume after several hours of study, was going over the problem of her relation to her father, a subject which the girls had several times discussed.

Isabel stood looking at the picture on Meta's dresser — that of a dark distinguished-looking man of a rugged somewhat reckless type. The spirited lift of the head which she had so often admired in Meta was there in the picture; and, too, the flashing eye, the proud curl of the lip. "He's a splendid-looking man, isn't he?" said Isabel.

"Yes, he is," answered Meta. "You'd notice him anywhere. I've always admired him tremendously."

"I think he's nice," ventured Isabel.

"He may be here in Jefferson for a few days before school closes," said the other girl, "and then you can see him. I'm going to tell him then to begin to plan for my being with him."

"But he's off in British Columbia so much of the

time,— and other wild places,— even Alaska. You don't want to stay there, do you?" Isabel had gone over all of this before.

"No, frankly, I don't." Meta was putting on a fresh frilled collar from a pile in her top dresser drawer. "It's beautiful in the West. I used to think I couldn't be happy anywhere else; but now —"

"Yes?" said Isabel encouragingly. She was still staring at Mr. Houston's picture.

"My interests — I *care* for things here," said Meta lamely. Isabel caught a glimpse of the struggle in her mind.

"It would be a hardship to go and live in some little lumbering camp, six months of the year, and spending the rest of the time scooting about between Helena and Seattle — or Sitka."

"Yes, it would; but I've pretty well made up my mind that that's the thing to do."

"Very well, Meta. It's your own life that you're dealing with." Isabel spoke with resignation.

"You'll come and visit me, Izzy-Wizzy?" Meta turned to look anxiously at her friend.

"Why, I'd love to. But of course the time that I'm free to go will probably be when you are traveling about."

"Then you'll have to travel with me." Meta's face was clouded.

"That would be exciting. I never get tired of traveling." Isabel was wondering where she was to get the money to go about with Meta. Presently she said, "I really must go home, now, or make a start, anyway. Come on and go a piece with me."

They went down the stairs, Meta with her hand on Isabel's shoulder.

On the hall table lay two or three letters. "Ah! one for me," said Meta. "From father!"

She stopped on the porch to read it. "Excuse me, won't you, while I take a look at it?" she said carelessly.

"Oh, of course," responded Isabel.

Meta tore open the envelope, and Isabel stood looking absently through the half-budded vines, at some workmen laying a new concrete sidewalk. The smell of the melted tar was acrid and unpleasant. Isabel was thinking about a fraternity dance which she was going to with Rodney.

An exclamation from Meta made Isabel turn sharply. The other girl's face was flushed and startled. She was reading the letter hastily, rustling through the pages with feverish hands. "Oh!" she cried again, with an angry intonation.

"What is it?" asked Isabel, suspecting disaster.

Meta looked up with a scared, wrathful countenance. She was more the barbaric princess than she had been for a year. There were tears of fury in her eyes. "How dare he do such a thing!" she burst out in a rage.

"What? what?"

Meta was oblivious to her friend's inquiries. "It's unkind! It's horrible! I won't have it," she was going on.

"Meta, *dear*, do tell me what's the matter." Isabel took the angry young woman by the elbow, and stared into her face.

"He's — he says — he's going to be married!"

There was a stunned silence; and then Isabel said weakly, "Well, that's not so very terrible. Other people have done it."

"He never considered me." Meta held the letter tightly in her clenched hand.

"He wasn't where he could, was he?" Isabel was prepared to defend Mr. Houston's romantic behavior.

"He might have, anyway," said Meta in a strangled voice. "He could have come here, or I could have gone there."

"I don't know why you should," retorted Isabel with some asperity. "He has his own life to live." Isabel was a great advocate of individual freedom.

"There you are, sticking up for him. He has no right to do such a thing," Meta went on hysterically. "I'll make him stop."

"Why, you can't — you mustn't," said Isabel in dismay. She drew Meta to the further end of the porch. "Don't talk so loud."

"I don't see why I mustn't." Meta was becoming sullen.

"He knows his own affairs," said Isabel. "And think of the woman — how she would feel."

"Yes, I *am* thinking of her. I suppose she's some dreadful person that he — we — will be ashamed of." The girl was very bitter.

"You don't seem like yourself," said Isabel in despair. "Your father is not the sort of man who would marry a dreadful person."

Meta was a trifle subdued by her friend's disapproval. "Well, anyway," she said, her lip trembling, "I should think he'd have more consideration,

when I was prepared to give up everything — all my ambitions — and — and other things, too, and sacrifice myself by making his life more agreeable —"

"Oho!" thought Isabel. "She feels injured because she can't be a martyr. I should think," she said aloud, "that you'd be glad you don't have to."

"Isabel Carleton, I didn't think you'd be so selfish — or at least want me to be. I should think that you'd want me to sacrifice myself for my father."

"Well, I was only rejoicing that you're relieved of the necessity of doing it." Isabel was smiling behind Meta's back. "It was just as noble of you, even if you didn't have to."

Something in her tone made Meta turn and say, "I believe you're making light of the whole thing. I am certainly surprised that you should be so — so frivolous."

"I think you'll take it more calmly after you've thought it over," said Isabel quietly. "I really must go on home. Now, promise me, Meta, that you won't write to your father until you've had chance to recover a little."

"I shan't promise," sulked Meta. "I shall tell him exactly what I think."

"Oh, no, you won't. You'll be more polite."

"One can't be polite when one's feelings are so terribly hurt."

"One needn't have hurt feelings."

"That's a nice thing for you to say — as sensitive as you are."

"Well, promise me, Meta."

"No, I won't promise."

"All right," sighed Isabel. She had thought

that Meta was getting over being hard and proud and unreasonable. But it seemed that she wasn't. "Good-by," said the younger girl, grieved at Meta's uncompromising attitude.

"Good-by."

Isabel left Meta sitting on a bench in the corner of the porch, her eyes cold and hard. "What do you think about it, mother?" she asked, when she had told Mrs. Carleton what had occurred.

"I can see how it would be a shock to her," said Mrs. Carleton.

"It seems almost," said Isabel meditatively, "as if she felt insulted because she isn't going to have a chance to make a martyr of herself. It's queer, isn't it, what notions people get?"

"I suppose that down under her consciousness she is aggrieved because she is cheated out of doing something that she had persuaded herself was noble and grand. We do get dreadfully self-righteous, without knowing it."

"I can see that that's true. And anyway, I don't believe Mr. Houston would ever have consented to accept her sacrifice, as she calls it."

"Nor I. And I'm glad that the poor man has some one to be a companion to him, who doesn't make him feel that she is giving up a career to do it."

"Meta's sure that she's an unsuitable person — the woman he's going to marry, I mean," reported Isabel.

"I don't see why she need be," answered Mrs. Carleton. "She knows well enough, if she stops to think, that her father is a man who has seen a good

deal of the world, and is likely to judge people fairly well."

"Yes, of course. That's just what I think."

"And I don't see," Mrs. Carleton went on, "why we need to assume that something is all wrong until we've had a chance to look into it, and see how much of it is all right."

"I suppose it's partly the idea of having a step-mother," Isabel remarked.

"I always thought that a silly prejudice, too," said Mrs. Carleton decidedly. "Most step-mothers have the kindest intentions toward their husband's children. The children ought to give them a chance, anyway, instead of starting in to make things as hard as they can."

"Y-yes. Only I'm glad I don't have to learn to love a step-mother," Isabel replied.

"You could, and you would." Mrs. Carleton smiled at her daughter. "And so will Meta, I feel sure."

"I'd like to see you make her think so," groaned Isabel. "She's as mad as a hornet at this stage of the game."

"Well, the game isn't over yet," answered the lady philosophically.

Celia had been talking about using a part of her small monthly allowance, to purchase a globe and some gold-fish, for which she had long yearned. One day she met Isabel at the door with the globe held in her two small hands, and the fish whisking triumphantly about inside.

"See what I have, Izzy-Wizzy," she shouted. "I just couldn't wait to show 'em to you. Aren't they perfectly lovely, Isabel?"

"Yes, they are." Isabel, properly enthusiastic, bent over to look at the bright creatures swirling through their narrow room. "I adore that wonderful gold and orange color that they seem to wear so carelessly."

"I love 'em," said Celia. "Here, hold the jar, won't you, Sister Dear? I want to show you something else."

Isabel took the jar and carried it into the sitting-room. Celia pulled a round tin box from her apron pocket. "There's some awful funny food for 'em in here," she explained. "Shall we feed the dear little things?"

"Oh, yes, let's. But it says on the box not to feed them too much."

Celia took a pinch of the food between her finger and thumb, and dropped it into the bowl. The gaping mouths of the fish snatched at the floating bits.

The little girl laughed delightedly. "I'm going to have the grandest time, having gold-fish belong to me," she crowed. "Now, where'll we put 'em, Goldilocks?"

Isabel looked about. "I think they'll look fine, right here on this little mahogany sewing-table of mother's." She set the globe in the middle of the stand. "See. The sun shines right on 'em and makes 'em look like real gold."

"Oh, that's grander than ever, Isabel."

Isabel, from her association with Miss Meade,

and her work in the Arts rooms at college, was acquiring a decided taste for color effects. "Oh, I know!" she cried. She brought a bit of Chinese embroidery with touches of orange, and put it under the bowl. And then she lifted from the mantel the vase which Rodney had given her at the rummage sale. It was full of blue "bachelor's buttons." "Isn't that a picture?" She stood off, admiring the effect.

"It's nice, but I like the fish best," said Celia, watching the darting gleams in the bowl. She was not intensely interested in color schemes.

Mrs. Carleton, who had already exhausted her vocabulary upon the fish, called from the hall that she was running over to Mrs. Lenner's, and that every one else was out.

"All right, mother, I'll look after Celia," said Isabel in return.

There was a gown to be pressed for the fraternity dance which she was going to, and she made ready the ironing board and the electric iron in the kitchen. Celia brought a book and cuddled into Melissy's rocking-chair. Isabel pressed the dress, and took it up the back stairs to her room. Then when she came down, she thought, "While my iron is hot, I might as well press out that center-piece that got mussed in the drawer. Mother wants to use it."

She went into the dining room to get the piece of linen. As she passed the door which led into the sitting-room, she looked toward the stand where the gold fish were so artistically ensconced. A big gray shadow dashed from the table; there was a splash, a crash of shattering glass.

"Bobo, you terrible cat!" shrieked Isabel.

Bobo had fled under the sofa with his victim, while the other gold-fish flopped wildly amid the streams of water on the rug.

Celia rushed in, screaming, "Oh, my darling fish!"

Isabel was on her knees beside the sofa, reaching under it for the cat, who was growling fiercely over his prey. Isabel seized him by one white paw, and dragged him forth, still clutching in his claws the bright body of the fish. The cat's ears were laid back, and his eyes were gleaming green with disappointment and wrath.

"You bad beast!" Isabel hissed at him.

"Is it dead, Izzy-Wizzy?" sobbed Celia.

"It's gone. Oh, dear, dear!" Isabel replied in great distress for Little Sister. Celia was howling dismally. "Pick up the other little fellow," said Isabel with as much calmness as she could command. She rose from her knees, distracted with the muss on the floor, the wails of Celia, and the guilt of the cowering Bobo.

Not till then did she understand that the orange-colored vase was lying in fragments among the moist wreckage on the floor. The flowers were draggled and prone; the lovely gleams of color were scattered like sunbeams over the sodden rug. She gave a cry which mingled with the sobs of Celia. "Oh, my lovely vase!"

But even then she remembered that she must do something to save the fish in Celia's hand. With a gulp of self-control, she ran to the kitchen, half filled a china bowl with water, and brought it back.

She set it on a chair, and Celia slipped the fish into it, where the little creature wriggled about cheerfully, quite forgetting its perilous adventure.

"Aw, the poor little fish-wishy," Celia was repeating as a kind of refrain over the dead fish. She took it clammily into her palm.

Isabel rushed at Bobo, who had retreated behind the table, and was glaring in frustrated savagery at the two girls. She boxed his ears soundly. He tore out of the room, his tail big, his body bristling with injured-innocence and rage.

Isabel threw herself into a chair, put her head down on the table, and cried. It seemed as if the vase had stood, in some mysterious way, for that glorious autumn afternoon in which she and Rodney had made up at Lake Kegonsah, after the long wretchedness of misunderstanding. It had meant so much that was precious, but that could not be expressed. Its bright rich color was a symbol. Isabel reflected, weeping, that it could scarcely be duplicated, and if it could, no other vase would ever have quite the same meaning.

Celia, frightened at the grief of Isabel, came and put her arms around Big Sister. "Don't cry, Goldilocks, don't cry," she implored.

Isabel wiped her eyes. She smelled something scorching in the kitchen. She ran out and found that the electric iron was burning a brown spot through the ironing-sheet. She rescued the iron and turned off the current; then set herself to the task of cleaning up the débris.

Tears started again as she swept the fragments of the vase into the dust-pan, along with the pieces

of the glass bowl. She sopped up the water, and put the flowers into the ugliest vase she could find. "I guess I was trying to be too artistic," she groaned.

Celia was chattering on about her troubles. "Fifty cents, the bowl cost, Isabel, and I paid it out of my own money. And now there's only one fish, and I bought two. And isn't it awful to see him lying there, all —"

"You can have another," Isabel consoled her. "*Fish* are easy to replace."

"It won't be just the same one," expostulated Celia, willing to defend her grief, as Isabel had been.

The older girl cleared away the evidences of the disaster, and helped to dispose of the unfortunate fish, in a shady nook in the garden. She wiped the tears from Celia's face, and hunted up an especially elegant piece of silk for a doll's dress, thus assuaging the little girl's grief. And then she began to feel conscience-stricken over the way in which she had pounced upon poor Bobo. "I've always contended," she muttered to herself, "that it was silly and unjust to punish animals for doing merely what Nature intended they should do."

Celia decided to go and see Milly Mitchell, in the hope that Milly's nurse, Sarah, would assist in constructing the doll's dress. Isabel went disconsolately upstairs, and sat down to read, thus trying to forget the shattered jar.

Through the open door of her room, she caught sight of Bobo, slinking along, his tail down, his back bent, his whole aspect that of one who fears another

unjust beating. Her heart smote her. She ran after the cat; but, casting a fearful glance at her, he scuttled into Fanny's room, and hid himself in a dark corner under the bed.

"Down on your knees again," cried Isabel to herself. She crawled under the bed for Bobo, soothed his hurt feelings by cuddlings and pettings, until he relaxed from the tense state of indignation and forgot his wrongs in sleep.

Sitting quietly, and thinking calmly about the vase, Isabel lost some of the soreness in her heart, which the demolishing of her treasure had produced. And besides, there was the fraternity dance to think about.

Even so, it was with a quiver of the lip that she said to Rodney that evening, in an interval between dances, "Rod, I have a sad tale to tell about the downfall of china."

"Eh? What have the Chinks been doing now? I thought they had a Republic or something," answered Rodney, staring at her vaguely.

"I'm not spelling it with a capital," Isabel returned sadly. "It's about that lovely—" she choked—"that lovely vase you gave me at the rummage-sale."

"Oh, so the Celestials have nothing to do with it? Well, what about the vase?" Rodney was clearly interested. He had rather admired the vase, himself.

"It—it's b-broken." Isabel could hardly get the words out.

"So?" Rodney was silent and frowning for a moment. Then his face cleared. "Well, let it go to smash, then," he said optimistically.

"It did." Isabel laughed, relieved at Rodney's remark. "Bobo did all he could to help."

"Trust Bobo for that. What particular method did he employ this time?"

Isabel told the story, making it as merry as she could.

"I'll try to get you another," said Rodney quickly, when she had finished.

"I don't think you could," said Isabel. "And anyway, I don't want another. I want to remember that just as it was."

"What it stood for isn't smashed, Isabel." For a moment Rodney's eyes had the same look in them that they had had when he stood under the apple-tree, a few days before.

"I know it. We've got to learn that it isn't the material things that count, anyway," Isabel said slowly. "The ideas that things stand for can't be touched, can they?"

"They cannot." Rodney was decisive. "What's a yellow jug beside —"

"Yes — beside —" Isabel was smiling up at him.

The music began again. "We have this one," said Rodney. And as they whirled lightly about the room, Isabel was conscious that *all* the soreness had gone from her heart. And in her memory the yellow jar was more beautiful than it had ever been.

A little later, there was another serio-comic tragedy among the Carletons. It happened because Melissy was persuaded to take an extra afternoon out.

Isabel came running into the kitchen. "Melissy," she said hurriedly, "Mrs. Mitchell telephoned that she'd like to take you for a ride in the car. She's taking Celia and Billy-Boy, and she wants you, too."

Melissy looked blank. She stood with the dishpan in her hand, her sleeves rolled up. "Landy!" she said, "I'd just love to go, but the lunch dishes ain't washed. I left 'em till I'd got the other things done." Her face showed that she was harrowed by contemplating this lost opportunity.

"Your kitchen is as neat as a pin, Melissy," protested Isabel. "Do let your dishes go till you come back."

"I don't know about that," said Melissy dubiously. "I never was one to let my work lay on the shelf, while I was gallivantin' around the country."

"We all know that," Isabel responded, "but Mrs. Mitchell wants to go while it's sunny, and it's so much nicer at this time of day than it is after every bit of work is all finished up."

"I'm just dreadful sorry, but I guess you'll have to tell her that I can't go."

"I've already told her that you're going," smiled Isabel.

"Land of Goshen!" Melissy's face was glowing with joy.

"Now, run along and get ready, for they'll be here in a minute. Go and get your hat on, and I'll lend you a long veil. Better put on that long coat of mother's. The wind is cold to-day."

She took Melissy by the arm, and hustled her jovially to the door. Mrs. Carleton met them in

the hall. "Of course you're going," she said. "What are a few dishes on a bright day like this? Scamper along. Celia's on the front porch, hopping up and down with impatience."

The car was tooting at the door when Melissy came downstairs, beaming. The veil was hurriedly tied on, and she ran out to join the others.

Fanny came in just as they were starting. "I think it's fine that Melissy can get away once in a while," she said.

"She didn't want to leave the dishes," Mrs. Carleton explained, looking after the car.

"Let's do 'em and surprise her," said Fanny impulsively, turning to Isabel.

Big Sister hesitated. "I have to go to an S. G. A. meeting," she said, "and —"

"We can do 'em in fifteen minutes," said Fanny, leading the way to the kitchen. "There's plenty of hot water in the tank"; she was feeling of the tank behind the stove. "Come on, Miss Fuss-Budget. I'll wash, so that you won't get your lily-white hands spoiled."

"All right," agreed Isabel. She ran to get aprons. Fanny was already turning the hot water into the dishpan. There was a light clatter of cups and spoons, as the work was done by nimble fingers trained in Domestic Science courses.

"Thirteen minutes!" exulted Fanny, as she hung up the dish-cloth. "Now to wash our hands and scatter." She glanced about the kitchen, which was now immaculate. "I'd hate to give up an automobile ride, just for a few silly dishes."

Isabel hurried away to her meeting, and when

that was over, she had a few minutes' talk with Meta, who, after all, had not written a "sharp note" to her father, but was still sullen and miserable.

When Isabel came back home, the house was singularly quiet. She found her mother in her own room, with the fragments of a blue silk gown spread out upon the bed. "What are you doing, Mother-of-Three?" asked Isabel from the doorway.

Mrs. Carleton looked up. "I've been thinking about this dress, and it occurred to me that with a good pattern, I could put it together myself, and it would give me an extra gown to wear for dinner at home, and such things."

"Yes, it would be pretty," said Isabel speculatively. "You always looked so nice in it, with the real lace fichu. It's too bad that the seams in the back pulled out."

"Well, it was getting rather out of date, anyway." Mrs. Carleton, with her head on one side, was considering how to make the somewhat scanty amount of goods go as far as possible.

"It's such a relief to have the house so silent," said Isabel, yawning. "I think I'll sit down and work at my long short-story for this month. I don't know that I'll ever get it finished. I'm sure I was never intended for a fiction writer, much as I used to think I was."

She went into her room and half closed the door, and then sat down at her desk. She was soon absorbed in the task of telling a ghost story, founded on the tale which she had heard at Tibbles Green, while she was in England. She was never quite sure

whether she had seen the ghost herself, or whether she had fallen asleep for a moment, and dreamed of the strange figure which had appeared in her room in the Fifteenth Century cottage.

While she was going through what she had written, cutting out a passage here and adding a line there, she heard her mother go downstairs. Later, she heard, without being really conscious of the fact, two rings, which she classified as being at the front and the back door. There was a bit of murmured talk; and then she heard her mother humming about at the back of the house.

At last Mrs. Carleton came up the back stairs, and the house was silent again. Isabel applied herself intently to her theme. Now and then she noted the distant yells of the college boys playing base-ball on the lower campus; the subdued whir of the street-cars; and the jangling bell on a junk man's wagon. A long time passed.

With a sigh, Isabel leaned back in her chair. Just then she heard quick decisive footsteps in the lower hall. The front door closed, not gently, but with a spiteful slam.

Rather surprised, Isabel stepped to the door of her room. Her mother stood in the opposite door, with a wild, horrified look on her face. "Who could have been downstairs?" asked Isabel. "Why, *what* is it, mother?"

"Oh, what have I done, what have I done?" cried Mrs. Carleton despairingly. She ran to the front window in the upper hall, and looked out. "Oh, I knew it! She's gone away furious," she groaned.

Isabel, looking over her mother's shoulder, saw a woman walking very stiffly, disappearing down the street. "It's Mrs. Colby, isn't it, mother?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, yes." Mrs. Carleton put her hand to her forehead with a humorous gesture of horror.

"What on earth is the matter?" Isabel cried impatiently. She wondered whether her mother were going mad.

"Why, Isabel — she came to call, and I forgot all about her!"

"You didn't, mother!"

"Yes, I did. I let her in, and just then the man came to the back door for your father's suit that was to be pressed; and I excused myself to Mrs. Colby —" Mrs. Carleton stopped, with her hand over her eyes.

"And left her in the sitting-room?" Isabel was incredulous.

"Yes, oh, yes! And then I forgot every solitary thing about her. I noticed that the man who came for the clothes had tracked in some sand, and I swept that up, and then I got the grape-fruit ready for dessert — it's so much better if it stands a while."

"I heard you in the kitchen," groaned Isabel.

"Then I remembered the dress that I was at," Mrs. Carleton went on wretchedly, "and how anxious I was to get it all cut out this afternoon — and I never thought about Mrs. Colby again."

"And she sat and sat —"

"And heard me going back and forth, humming

around —" Mrs. Carleton's voice trembled, as if she hardly knew whether to laugh or cry.

"Rattling the dishes and singing a hymn-tune." Isabel burst into giggles which could not be repressed.

"Oh, dear!"

"And she up and stalks away, mad as a wet hen." The girl was laughing hilariously, in spite of her sympathy for her mother.

"I can't blame her," Mrs. Carleton was saying remorsefully. "It was fearfully insulting."

"Oh, I don't know," said Isabel. "She might have known you wouldn't do it purposely. She might have come to the kitchen door, or called up the stairs or something. Poor mother!"

"I've heard that she was easily offended," said the shamefaced lady; "and I particularly wanted to be nice to her, because she's just been appointed to my committee in the Woman's Club."

"And I was terribly in hopes that she'd give us something for the Fund, this summer, because we'll need such a lot to start in with, in the fall." Isabel was still giggling, but she began to look serious, too. "It's rather awful. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll have to go and see her, I suppose — or write her a note. Perhaps that would be safer. I don't want her to shut the door in my face."

"I don't believe she'd quite do that. But I can see that the Fund will never profit by Mrs. Colby. She'll probably run a block when she sees us, after this."

"I'm overcome with chagrin. I can't say any-

thing to your father any more, about his being absent-minded, can I?" Laughing, but with tears in her eyes, Mrs. Carleton went to roll up the silk goods on the bed. "I'm too upset to do anything more to-day," she said mournfully.

Isabel, still chuckling, went back to her story.

She heard the honk of the returning automobile, and then the chatter of Celia, mingled with the shrill admonitory tones of Melissy. She put aside her work, and went back to her mother's room. Mrs. Carleton, in a low willow chair, was knitting in the intervals of wiping her eyes. Isabel put her arm around her mother's shoulder.

"Never mind, Mumsey," she said. "I'll take a note to Mrs. Colby, and I believe it can all be fixed up. And we have another perfectly lovely one added to our family collection of jokes!"

CHAPTER XI

THE COMMITTEE FOR STUDENT HONESTY

THE family had just finished lunch, and were still sitting at the table, when the postman rang, and Melissy brought in the mail. There were several letters for Professor Carleton, and there was one for Isabel. With a murmured apology, Isabel ran through hers, while Celia excused herself and disappeared into the kitchen, and Fanny talked with her mother about some errands which were to be done on the way home from school.

"Half my interest nowadays seems to be centered in letters," said Isabel. "Here's one from Evelyn Taylor — or Evelyn Delafield, I suppose I must call her now."

"You haven't heard from her in a great while, have you?" said Mrs. Carleton.

"No, but when people are married, you can't expect much of them as friends, I'm beginning to think."

"I dare say she's busy," Mrs. Carleton agreed.

"Yes, she has a lovely little bungalow. See, she's sent me a kodak picture of it — roses all around it; there must be jungles of roses in Portland, and labyrinths of hydrangeas." Isabel displayed the picture, which Fanny and her mother glanced at. "Evelyn says she has to do quite a lot of her own work, because help is so scarce."

"I shouldn't think she'd like that," said Fanny. "She always seemed to like nice clothes so well, and want to keep her hands pretty."

"She says she blunders along, and burns herself and the puddings once in a while, but she does very well for all that."

"I thought Evelyn would make a very sweet domestic little housewife," Mrs. Carleton said pleasantly; "and that Fred would let her do just about as she pleased."

"He has to," answered Isabel with a smile; "women vote out there, you know. Fred has entered right into the spirit of things. He says he isn't going to have his wife waiting on him all the time, and degenerating into either a domestic servant or an ornament; so he encourages her to join some clubs, and help along with a day nursery, and do things for the women in the canning factories. He says he can take his dinner at a restaurant once in a while, or go without, rather than have Evelyn a slave to the kitchen."

"I'm going to go West and get married," spoke up Fanny. "I'm not going to spend my life thinking what a man likes to eat, and where his clean socks are."

"Hush, Fanny," admonished Mrs. Carleton. "You're too young to talk about such things."

"You can't begin too young to be independent," Fanny returned. But she subsided when Professor Carleton looked over his glasses at her with a surprised air.

"It's very nice to hear about Evelyn again," said Mrs. Carleton hurriedly. "You and she enjoyed

each other's society so much. What is it, Arthur?" she asked, noting that her husband had finished his letters. "Has something good happened?"

"I think you'll call it so, my dear." The others sat breathless. "I've been appointed head of my department." The professor could not conceal the satisfaction which he felt.

"Oh, hooray, father!" Isabel clapped her hands.

"Good for old Popsey-Professor!" shouted Fanny.

"I'm perfectly delighted, Arthur," cried Mrs. Carleton. "I knew it would come out in that way. They couldn't do otherwise. They had to be fair, you know."

"Oh, we're so pleased and proud!" Isabel leaned over to pat the fingers that still held the letter which told the good news.

"I'm afraid that the first thing I think of is that it means greater financial freedom for my family," confessed the new head of the department. "I used to scorn such base considerations; but with prices as they are now, a man has to think of his family before he allows himself any academic notions."

"I don't believe you exactly mean that," said Mrs. Carleton, "but the strain on a professor now is really rather dreadful. There was a time when you put your research work above everything else; and you had a secret hope that you might become a great man. Didn't you, dear?"

Professor Carleton smiled wistfully across the table at his wife. "Every young man thinks he's

going to be something out of the ordinary. But now I know I'm just going to plod along, doing the same thing over and over, and being as honest and happy as I can."

"Poor father! Your family is a sort of Old Man of the Sea on your back, isn't it?" commiserated Isabel.

"Not at all. Or if it is, I love my Incubus, and would not have it snatched away."

"The Old Man loves you, anyway," said Fanny humbly to her father, "and tries to be grateful, even if it doesn't act so." This was a good deal, to come from Fanny.

"I don't want gratitude, but I do want love," returned Professor Carleton. "And to change the subject, I have a request for a magazine article, to be sent in very soon; and six commencement lectures (another one in a letter, here), and two club lectures. So I shall be so busy that I shall hardly come to meals for a while."

"I like father because he's so smart," Fanny remarked, "but there are other reasons, too. He's the best-looking man on the faculty, I think. That counts for a good deal. Father, I'm not at all sure I'd love you quite so much if you had a cross-eye like Professor Hunter, or red whiskers and a hooked nose, like Professor Rausch."

"Fanny, child," protested Mrs. Carleton. "You know they are very splendid men; and how do you know that Antoinette Hunter doesn't love her father just as much as you do yours?"

"Maybe she does, mother. I was just saying that I couldn't."

Professor Carleton looked his disapproval. "I fear you are incurably frivolous, Fanny," he said. "Handsome is as handsome does, you know."

"But you're *Is* and *Does,* both, Pappy. That's what I was chortling about."

"Well, as I was saying," the professor went on, ignoring Fanny's reply, "I feel, as I've so often told you, that self-expression is the thing that makes us all useful and happy."

"I believe we have heard something of that kind before." Isabel bit her lip. "I'm not sure, father, but what your middle name is Self-Expression."

"If it isn't, it ought to be," laughed the professor. "Anyway, you youngsters can't hear too much about developing your own individualities."

"We're having it hammered into us," responded Fanny. "I'm getting so that I can't take a drink of water or lace up my shoes without wondering whether I'm expressing my Best Self."

"That's carrying it rather far." The professor rose from the table. "Well, I promised Rambeau that I'd meet him at the University Club to talk over some faculty matters. I must be off."

"Many, many congratulations, Most Worthy Professor," cried Isabel. She squeezed her father's hand as he went by her chair. "He's a dear, isn't he?" she said, after he had gone. "He does so want us to be perfect. It's rather pathetic, isn't it, mother?"

"I don't know that I should call it that," Mrs. Carleton replied. "But he does want you to be the very best you can, with your opportunities, and the parents that it's been your lot to have."

" If we don't turn out any worse than they have, I don't think we'll be so very bad," meditated Fanny.

Just then Celia came running in from the kitchen, with Melissy following her somewhat shyly.

" Oh, mother, look what Melissy made for me," cried the child. " She made it her very own self." She displayed a crocheted collar, of an intricate and attractive pattern, which she was wearing in place of her usual linen one.

" Oh, isn't that sweet! " Fanny slid her fingers under the collar, and examined its beautifully woven pattern. " Did Melissy really make that for you? "

" I just did it at odd times. It's easy when you know how," beamed Melissy, her sharp face softened by pride and affection. " I finished it while the corn-muffins was baking."

" It's ever so kind of you, Melissy," said Mrs. Carleton gratefully.

" I loved to do it," Melissy answered. She was standing with her hands folded in her apron. " I remember, when I was a little girl, I didn't have anything pretty to wear, and I always used to stare at the things the other girls wore to school. I recollect that when a little miss came to school with a crocheted collar on, that her mother had made for her, I went out behind the rows of cordwood in the yard, and cried. I don't know whether it was more because I didn't have any mother or any collar, but I guess it was kind-a both."

Fanny looked over at Isabel with a suspicion of tears in her dark eyes.

Melissy was going on, " I have a feeling that I'd

like to give every little girl I see a lace collar. Of course, I know that Celia has lots of pretty things, but I just did want to give her this."

"We love you for it, Melissy," Mrs. Carleton said again. "Thank you ever so much. Did you thank her, Celia?"

"I should say I did. But thank you again — and more, too," called Celia, as Melissy went back to the kitchen.

"Poor Melissy!" Isabel burst out. "She makes me feel a kind of rage at the inequalities in this world. I can't see yet why some people should have so much and others so little."

"I think Melissy has a whole lot," Fanny sent back,—"a good deal more than some snips of girls I've seen, who togged themselves out in gew-gaws, and were always swooning for pink silk petticoats and high-heeled shoes."

"Don't 'git pussonal,' Fan," pleaded Isabel. "I think Melissy has a lot, too, if you mean kindness of heart, and things like that."

"That's what I do mean. She can teach us all something. I don't think that white hands and good grammar count for so very much, if you haven't any character to go with 'em."

"You make me feel about a foot high," said Isabel. "And goodness me, look at the hour. I must skip along, for I have to go to a very important meeting of my committee in the Self Government Association." She felt very important, herself, for she had lately been asked to serve on the Committee for Student Honesty.

As she hurried up the Hill, she was thinking about

this committee and some matters connected with the Ramsay Fund for girls. Rather out of breath, she ran upstairs to the class-room where the meeting of the Committee was to be held. Those in the seats were chatting with one another when she went in. She sat down beside a Miss Weaver, a severe young woman with hard eyes. This Miss Weaver had been graduated from a Normal School, and had taught school in the grades in a small town, in order to earn money to come to college. This much she had confided to Isabel at a previous meeting.

"It's a case of cheating, to-day," said Miss Weaver.

"Yes, so I understood," returned Isabel cautiously.

"There's no necessity of that sort of thing, whatever," Miss Weaver went on. "*I* never had to cheat to get through school."

"No, of course not," Isabel answered. "But people are not all constituted alike."

"They all ought to be honest, even if they aren't constituted alike," said the other young woman in a sharp voice. She looked at Isabel as if she thought her inexcusably lax.

"Oh, of course," Isabel murmured. She was glad that the Chairman called the meeting to order at that point.

"We have had this special meeting called to-day," the Chairman said, "to consider the case of Miss Harriet Plover, who has been accused of cheating in a French examination." He then read the statement of the instructor who, it seems, had detected the girl peeping into her grammar at a quiz. He

had spoken to her privately, after the class, so that the rest of the students in that section had known nothing of the accusation. The girl had admitted the charge, and the instructor recommended that she be dealt with by the Committee for Student Honesty, a branch of the Self Government Association.

There were a few questions by members of the Committee, and then the Chairman said to Isabel, who was sitting at the end of a row of seats, "Miss Carleton, will you bring Miss Plover in? She's waiting in the next room."

"Certainly," Isabel replied. Her heart sank. She stepped into the next room, which was connected with the one which the Committee was in. A disconsolate form was huddled on a bench at the back of the room. Isabel went over and touched the girl on the shoulder. Miss Plover, a girl of seventeen, with a plump pretty figure, started, and turned a tear-stained face to Isabel. "You're to come into the committee-room," said the older girl, as gently as she could, for she was harrowed by the misery in the eyes of the other.

The girl shrank away. "It doesn't seem as if I could," she said tremblingly.

Isabel stood looking at her absently. What if it were herself — or Fanny — brought face to face with a Committee? she thought. "You must," she said aloud to Miss Plover; adding, as she slipped her arm around the girl's waist, "Don't be frightened. I think they'll be kind." She was not so sure, herself. "Anyway, it's best to get it over."

"Yes, I've got to get it over — or — or I don't

know what will happen," said Harriet, with a gasping sob.

She walked unsteadily toward the door. She wore a very stylish little dark blue silk gown, with bronze pumps, and hose to match; her organdie collar and velvet bow were peculiarly coquettish, and she wore her hair brought forward in two shells, against her over-red cheeks.

"Poor frivolous little thing!" was Isabel's thought, as she looked at the young girl beside her. "I hope they won't be too cruel." She remembered the hard eyes of Miss Weaver. The two girls entered the committee-room, and stood before the members of the group, a varied lot, with thoughtful or pitying or contemptuous faces. At a gesture from the Chairman, Isabel sat down, and left Harriet standing close beside her.

"Miss Plover," said the Chairman, in a courteously impartial voice, "as you know, you have been called before this Committee, to answer a charge filed against you, to the effect that you were caught cheating in your first-year French class." The girl stood looking down, her hands nervously clutching her handkerchief. "Have you any explanation or defense to make?" asked the Chairman in a kinder tone than before.

"Only — only —" began Harriet Plover in a low voice, "that I was afraid to fail — it seemed as if I couldn't bear it. My father would have been so — disappointed." It sounded as if she had intended to use a different word from the one at the last.

"Couldn't you pass your examinations without *cheating?*" The expression came out sternly.

The girl's head went lower. "I suppose I could, if I had studied; but I hadn't studied before that quiz."

"Why not?"

"I intended to; but — but I suppose I was having too good a time."

"Did you come to college to have a good time?"

"Not exactly. But I never was away from home before — I entered in the second semester — and it seemed so good to do just as I pleased — and I was having such a good time, and the girls said one didn't have to study very hard, just to get through —" She stopped, as if she were choking.

"Well?" the Chairman encouraged.

"And Monsieur D'Albert told me I'd fail if I didn't do better on the next test. So I intended to study hard — I really did — but that night some one asked me to go canoeing, and then —"

"You didn't get your studying done?" The Chairman spoke again after the silence had become oppressive.

"No. And all of a sudden, I thought how my father would go on if I failed. He's a — a — *hard* father —"

Isabel held her hands together very tightly in her lap. How would it seem, she thought, to have a "*hard*" father, who "went on" when one failed?

"I never did such a thing before," Harriet was saying. Her voice broke piteously.

"Then you do not deny the accusation?" asked the Chairman in a formal manner.

"No," answered Harriet with dry lips.

"Has any one anything to say?" asked the Chairman, turning to the members of the Committee, who had sat listening intently to what was being said.

Miss Weaver rose severely to her feet. "Mr. Chairman," she said in her cold voice, "I wish to say that I do not think we should be easy with such an offender. She admits the truth of the charge against her. She confesses that she has not studied. She has frittered away her time, and then tried to get through by cheating. It is a flagrant case, and I believe we ought to deal with it without mercy. There is no excuse for such behavior, and the sooner people find that out, the better it will be for them." She stared hard at Harriet Plover as she sat down.

There was a tense silence in the room, after Miss Weaver had spoken. A man on a back seat nodded solemnly. Another man looked furtively at his watch.

"Is there any one else who wishes to speak?" asked the Chairman, not very encouragingly.

Isabel forgot herself, and leaped to her feet. "I wish to ask," she began impetuously, "where Miss Plover has been living, and whether, as a freshman, she has had proper supervision since she came to college."

The Chairman looked surprised. He turned to Miss Plover with a polite, "Will you answer the question Miss Carleton has asked?"

"I've been rooming at Mrs. Caldwell's, on South Brooks Street," answered Harriet.

"And going out for your meals?" queried Isabel.

"Yes."

"I'd like to inquire whether Mrs. Caldwell pays any attention to the hours that the girls in her house keep, or the amount of time that they give to their studying?"

"Does she, Miss Plover?" asked the Chairman, deeply interested.

"No, not the least little bit," replied Harriet with spirit. "She just wanted her money, and when she got that, she let us do exactly as we pleased."

"And you did?" said Isabel with a flicker of a smile.

"Yes — I am afraid I did, just exactly." Harriet spoke contritely, as one confesses one's faults to a friend.

"Well, I think," said Isabel, her eyes flashing, "that the trouble is not altogether with Miss Plover. She came here, a young, unprotected girl, and was sent to a place recommended by the University, and she had not the slightest bit of supervision or correction or advice. She was intoxicated by freedom, as so many girls are, who have been dealt with severely at home. She loved to do as she pleased, and didn't realize what it might lead to. It's terribly tempting — this having a good time — if a girl is attractive and full of life." She paused. Miss Weaver stared at her sourly. Isabel went on. "It seems to me that Mrs. Caldwell and the University ought to be here on trial, instead of Miss Plover. If it is true that Mrs. Caldwell doesn't look after the girls who are rooming at her house, then her permission to have University roomers ought to be taken away from her. What we need is more dormitories, where the girls can live under supervision;

and the Dean of Women needs more help, so that she can send some one out to see how the girls are cared for; and we need a lot more direction and help for the younger boys and girls who haven't learned how to study. I feel, oh, I feel very strongly, that Miss Plover ought to be given another chance. Don't let's expel her," Isabel pleaded, turning toward the committee. "Let's help her, and see if she can't redeem herself."

The others were sitting up straighter, and some of the committee nodded vigorously. At the same time, Miss Weaver squirmed in her seat, and shook her head with great vehemence.

A shy looking woman got up and said haltingly, "What Miss Carleton has said is just what I think, only I hadn't the courage to say it as she has. I believe that Miss Plover should be dealt with leniently and given another chance. Moreover, I believe that this matter should be kept secret, so that she need not be under a stigma of any sort. I feel certain that she will never do anything like this again."

"I never, never will!" Harriet burst out passionately.

Glancing back, Isabel saw that the faces behind her were more kindly and generous than they had been. She rose once more. "I agree with what has been said," she remarked. "I believe that, contrary to the usual custom, no notice should be sent to Miss Plover's father. When she feels better about this matter, she may want to tell him; but till then, I think the matter is one which she must face alone — if possible, without condemnation."

The Chairman looked relieved. "Is there a motion?" he asked, cheerfully.

A tall young man whom Isabel had noticed several times about the campus, rose with his hands in his pockets, and in a very dry voice put the motion: "Mr. Chairman, I move that Miss Harriet Plover be discharged without punishment, and without having her — er — mistake revealed to any one. I also move that this Committee send a strong recommendation to the Board of Regents, asking that an assistant be granted to the Dean of Women, so that girls living away from home can be more closely supervised; and I may add, that Mrs. Caldwell's methods be investigated."

"Is there a second to the motion?" asked the Chairman.

The motion was quickly seconded and passed, with only two dissenting voices, the louder of which was Miss Weaver's.

"You are discharged, Miss Plover," said the Chairman, "and we feel assured that this experience has been punishment enough,— that you will never put yourself in such a position again."

"I want to thank you for being kind —" began Miss Plover, but her voice broke. She buried her face in her hands, and Isabel rose and led her from the room.

In the next room she gave the weeping girl a hug. "Oh, I'm so glad, so glad they gave you a chance!" she cried.

Harriet looked up, wiping her eyes. "Oh, it's so wonderful to be free!" she gasped. "If I'd been sent home — oh, Miss Carleton, you don't know my

father. I couldn't bear facing him. I should have run away — or — or something worse," she began to sob again.

Isabel patted her on the shoulder. "Never mind. It's all over now. You can make a new start." She had a sudden thought. "Don't you want to come home and have dinner at my house? I live here in Jefferson, you know."

The girl's face lighted. "You're Professor Carleton's daughter, aren't you?"

"Yes. We call him our Popsey-Professor. He's a dear." Isabel thought the next moment that it was rather cruel to contrast her own father with Miss Plover's "hard" one. "Won't you come?" she asked hastily. "My mother'd love to have you."

"I'd love to come. Would it be all right?" answered Harriet.

"Why, of course. I'll telephone mother from father's office. I have to go back to the Committee meeting now, and I have classes later. You do too, don't you?"

"Yes, but I don't know —" Harriet hesitated.

"Oh, you can go to them all right," Isabel encouraged her, "if you just go down to the dressing-room and wash your eyes in cold water. Nobody will know a thing. And I'll meet you in the Women's Study Room at five, and we can have a little walk before dinner. Will that suit you?"

"I should say it would! I'll be waiting."

Isabel went back for the other business of the Committee, and then hurried to her afternoon classes. At the time appointed, she found Harriet

sitting in the window of the Women's Study Room. The traces of tears had long since disappeared, and a new look of happiness and resolution almost transfigured the face of the young girl. Isabel felt somehow immensely older and stronger than this frivolous child, although the difference in years was not very great.

They took a leisurely stroll along the lake path, and talked about everything except the trouble which Harriet had been through. It was nearly dinnertime when they arrived at the Carleton home. Mrs. Carleton was coming downstairs, freshly dressed and smiling. "Mother, I've brought Harriet Plover, as I told you," said Isabel. "I hope you're going to have something especially good, for dinner, because we've been for a walk, and we're nearly starved."

Mrs. Carleton gave Isabel a kiss, and stretched a welcoming hand to Harriet. "I'm very glad to have you with us," she said simply. "Melissy has made us a chicken pie — the kind we have out at Grandmother's; so your two hungers can be stayed, at least, if not satisfied."

"Hooray for Melissy!" cried Isabel. "She and father are distinguishing themselves to-day. Come on upstairs, Miss Plover — oh, shan't I call you Harriet?"

"Yes, do," responded the guest with a grateful smile.

After Harriet had taken off her hat, and powdered her nose a bit, and looked at Isabel's room, and met Fanny, and heard about Celia, the gong

rang for dinner. The girls went down, chatting like old friends.

The table looked very pretty, with the candles in the yellow shades — it was too light for the lamps — the daffodils in a glass vase, the shining linen and silver. "What a relief from the cafeteria!" exclaimed Harriet, taking hold of Isabel's arm. "I'm so glad you asked me."

The quiet home meal, with the delicious food and the gay conversation, was a very great pleasure to Harriet, though she was clearly somewhat in awe of Professor Carleton, especially when she gathered from the talk around the table that he had been made the head of his department. "I always think of professors as sitting on platforms and lecturing to hordes of students, but never as actually sitting at a table and eating," she said, flushing at her own boldness.

"My girls have no respect for professors whatever," laughed the father of the family. "They see them eating, far too often."

Harriet could not stay long after dinner, for she had to get back to her room and begin her belated studying. When she was putting on her stylish hat before the glass in Isabel's room, she said with a determined quiver in her voice, "I'm going to get right at that French and *dig*."

Isabel had been thinking hard, all through dinner. "I'll help you for a few days, until you get started again," she said quietly. It was really difficult for her to give up her time, but Harriet needed help very badly just then.

"Oh, *would* you?" Harriet looked at her new friend with incredulous delight.

"I'd like to. I've had quite a little French, you know. And when I was studying the grammar the first time, I worked out a little scheme for memorizing irregular verbs, which I think will help you. Do you have a vacant hour in the forenoon?"

"Yes, at eleven o'clock."

"So do I. I'll meet you in Room 345 — that's the one next the big French classroom. It's vacant at that hour, and I often go in there to study."

"It will be splendid to have some one to give me a lift," Harriet said, almost in tears. "I felt as if I could never make up what I'd lost."

"Yes, you *can*. You'll be all right in a week or two, if you study like mad."

"I'll do that, believe me."

"All right, lady. To-morrow, eleven o'clock, Room 345."

Harriet put her arms around Isabel. "I can't thank you," she said feelingly.

"No need to," answered Isabel blithely. "It was a trifle. Come and say good-night to mother. I think she's in her room."

After more good-nights, Harriet went away with a smile and a bright hope in her eyes.

Isabel got out her books with a sigh. She was very tired. "But it was worth while, and I learned a lot," she said to herself. "And I'm not even going to tell mother about what happened to Harriet. It wouldn't be fair. Now for this report on the Corn Laws. Funny name, when there wasn't

really any corn." She yawned and began to bury herself with the inevitable and wearisome "report," which seems to form the staple of the academic work in college.

CHAPTER XII

A BOHEMIAN FOLK-SONG

ISABEL was in her room, working on an unusually difficult French theme, which she was very desirous of finishing that evening. With dictionary and grammar, she was struggling to express in French a report of an English lecture in psychology which had been assigned as a part of the term's work. Fanny was in her own room, practicing her music lesson for the next day. Monotonously the sound of the violin came through the wall — one bar of a folk-song in a minor key, played over and over. Isabel had stopped to listen to it at first, for its melancholy seemed attractive; but after a while she began to fidget and to lose her train of thought. As time went on, the scream of the violin, reiterating the rather harsh minor cadence, completely unnerved her.

"Ugh! I do wish Fanny would stop," she muttered. "It's driving me mad." She threw down her pen, and nervously arranged her papers, waiting for the music to stop. But Fanny had changed to another bar, and kept going over and over it, as she had done with the other. "Oh, dear," groaned Isabel despairingly.

She made another effort to concentrate on the theme, which was one upon which a whole week's mark depended. "I did so want to have it right,"

she murmured, "but I'm getting so desperate that I can't tell one word from another." It seemed as if the bow of the violin were being sawed across her nerves. At last she gave up, and laid her books aside. "I'll have to go downstairs until Fanny gets through," she said to herself.

But just then with a long wail the playing stopped. Isabel went back to her theme. She was "all on edge," ready to jump up and down with nervousness. She heard a step at the door. Fanny tapped and then came in, looking haggard and tired. "I wanted to borrow that book of travels that you brought home from the library," she said. "It's about Sweden, you know, and there's something in it about folk-dances, and folk-songs. I thought I'd look at it after I got into bed."

"It's there on the book-case," answered Isabel, her brow knitted over an irregular verb. "Goodness! what is the imperfect of that verb, anyway?" Then, as Fanny turned away with the book, some evil demon prompted Isabel to say, in half-humorous irritation, "For goodness' sake, Fan, I'm glad I haven't chosen such an uproarious profession as yours!" She ran her finger down the page of the dictionary without looking up. "If I set out to make a gew-gaw, everybody in town doesn't need to know it."

Fanny stopped and stared. "Not unless you talk about it, which I notice you're quite capable of doing," she answered stiffly. "I'm sorry you find me a nuisance," she went on, "but I don't see how I'm to learn to play without practicing."

"Oh, it's all right," said Isabel quickly. "I'm

sorry I said what I did but I was trying to get this French theme finished, and I couldn't concentrate on anything."

"I don't know that your French theme is any more important than my Bohemian folk-song," returned Fanny.

"It isn't — of course it isn't," said Isabel, already ashamed of her peevishness. "But you kept doing the same bar over and over."

"I had to get it right, didn't I?" Fanny was very tart in her reply.

"Yes, yes, I know you did. I'm sorry that I spoke." Isabel fluttered the leaves of the dictionary impatiently.

"I think you're unkind, Isabel," Fanny was going on, "to make a fuss when I'm trying to do the best I can, to get along with my school work and practicing, too. If I didn't have to go to school, I could do my practicing while the rest of the family are out of the house; but I don't see how I'm going to get an education and study music at the same time, if I don't do my practicing just whenever I can —"

"Oh, Fanny, that's enough!" cried Isabel. "I understand perfectly how difficult it is for you. I wish you'd accept my apologies."

"I can't see that apologies count for very much, when you've said something that hurts another person's feelings." Fanny stood with her hand on the door-knob, and Isabel could see that the hand was shaking.

"Well, I don't know that they do count for very much," the older girl conceded. "But they're the best I can offer, aren't they?"

"The best thing you can do is to think before you speak, and keep from hurting people's feelings, then."

Isabel was getting terribly bored with this futile discussion. "Well, if people are going to be so painfully sensitive that their feelings are always lying around loose for other folks to hurt, I don't know what any one can do."

"They can be a little more considerate. You needn't think, Isabel Carleton, that the only one in this house who has any rights is your own little self." Fanny's voice was rising to a wail.

"I never did cherish such an illusion," said Isabel coldly. "And certainly I have been properly put in my place now, so that henceforth I shall know my bounds and limits."

"You might be told, and you might know, but that's no sign you'd pay any attention to 'em."

"Oh-h-h!" Isabel sighed in exasperation, "let's not talk about it any more, Angel Child. I think we've said enough, and I for one want to get something done this evening. I can't spend my whole time wrangling about nothing."

"I'm not an Angel Child," snapped Fanny.

"Is it possible?" Isabel was amiably satirical.

"No, and you needn't call me that. And as for wrangling, I'd like to know who started it. You —"

Isabel put her hands over her ears. "Oh, my stars, Fanny," she groaned, "what in the world ails you?"

"Yes, it's all my fault," shrilled Fanny. She dropped the book on the floor with a thud, and burst into tears.

Mrs. Carleton, across the hall, had heard the echoes of the altercation. She looked in, with an astonished face. "What on earth is the matter, girls?" she asked. "Fanny, dear, what *are* you crying about?"

Fanny brushed past her mother without answering, and fled to her own room. She shut the door with a bang, but her sobs could be heard through the partition.

"Isabel, what have you done to Fanny?" questioned Mrs. Carleton. "It must have been something pretty bad."

"I haven't done anything," responded the girl wretchedly. "I hardly know now what it was all about. It was just nothing at all. I don't see why she has to go all to pieces, like a firecracker." Isabel put her head down on the desk and began to cry.

"Oh, dear, to think that sisters should get into such a squabble! You're the older, Isabel," said Mrs. Carleton with reproach in her tone. "You might have been a little more patient." Her own voice trembled.

Isabel began laughing hysterically. "Mother, if you cry, I shall go mad!" she said.

"But what was the trouble?" Mrs. Carleton queried, controlling herself.

Isabel wiped her eyes. "It was because Fanny kept sawing away at the same bars over and over—"

"Yes, it is trying, at times," Mrs. Carleton admitted.

"And I got so nervous I could scarcely keep from shrieking; and then, just at the wrong minute, she came into the room to borrow a book, and — oh,

mother, I'm sorry, but I said something, half-joking, you know, about being glad that I hadn't chosen such a noisy occupation in life —"

"Oh, Isabel!"

"Well, I didn't think how it sounded."

"You know how sensitive Fanny is."

"I ought to know. I suppose one has to be, to play the violin." Isabel wiped her eyes again. "But she needn't have been so ready to take offense."

"She was tired out. She practiced two hours this afternoon, between school and dinner, and then again this evening." Mrs. Carleton walked about the room, frowning. Fanny's muffled sobs could still be heard from the next room. "I don't like to have her upset like this. She's under strain enough, trying to do so much. Herr Reuter is a dreadfully driving teacher." The sobbing grew louder. "I'll have to go and see what I can do."

"Oh, what an awful business," Isabel moaned. "I'm just as sorry as I can be. Honestly, I was so on edge that I didn't realize what I was saying."

"I know. But words, Isabel — they hurt so — and you can't unsay them."

Isabel did not answer. She sat down to work on her theme, but she was far too miserable to accomplish anything. The marks on the page ran together in a meaningless jumble. "I won't cry," thought the girl. "Mother'd be distracted with both of us at it."

She went to the hall door. She could hear the low expostulations and consolings of her mother, and the continued hysterical sobbing of Fanny, and her

fragmentary answers. Isabel went back and shut the door. "To think that I should be such a vixen," she thought; "almost grown up, and then to get into a childish quarrel like this! Poor Fan! She was worn to a frazzle. Herr Reuter's been pushing her terribly hard, and it's dreadful to try to go to school and be a musical genius all at once. Nobody ought to attempt it."

Unable to settle down, she opened the door again, and tiptoed down the hall. At Fanny's door she hesitated, then tapped on the panel, and turned the knob. Her mother was leaning over the bed. Fanny was lying on the white counterpane, crying wearily, with long exhausting sobs, as if she could not stop. Mrs. Carleton looked up apprehensively.

Isabel came forward. "Don't, Fanny, don't," she exhorted desperately. "I didn't mean —"

But Fanny shook herself, in another paroxysm of self-pity, and burying her face in the pillows, began to cry more loudly than before. Mrs. Carleton waved off the intruder. "Not now, Isabel," she said in a low voice.

Isabel withdrew from the room. In the hall she met Celia, in her night-gown, blinking and staring. "What's the matter, Izzy?" she asked. "Who's crying?"

"Oh, it's just Fanny."

"Has anything awful happened?" Celia looked up, her small face twisted with distress.

Isabel groaned. "You'd think the whole family had been poisoned," she answered. "No, dearie. She's just tired."

"But she cries so *hard*." Celia's chin quivered.

"Oh, my goodness, Childie-Bird, don't begin weeping, too. I can't stand it," Isabel complained. "Come on back to bed." She took the little girl by the hand, and led her into the small room at the end of the hall, with its narrow white bed, and the doll's-house in the corner.

"Tell me a story," begged Celia.

"No, I can't, Celia, dear. I'm too tired. Now go to sleep, like a good girl." She kissed Celia, and then went back to her own room. Studying was out of the question. She put on her kimono and sat by the window. The clock showed half-past ten when she heard her father come in, and go into his study.

Finally Mrs. Carleton came into Isabel's room. "I'm in despair," she said. "Fanny's in a miserable state. As soon as I get her quieted, she begins crying again. She's absolutely worn out."

"Mother, I'm desolated," Isabel replied. "Isn't there anything I can *do?* I'd be so glad."

"I wouldn't risk going in there again. Wait till morning. I'll get my dressing gown on. And I'll tell you what you might do. Go down and make some nice cool lemonade for Fanny. She likes it quite tart, you know. I believe it will taste good to her. She's almost feverish, she's cried so much."

Thankful to be able to do something, Isabel ran downstairs to the kitchen, and busied herself with squeezing the lemons, getting out the sugar, and cracking the ice for the pitcher of lemonade. While she was at work, her father came strolling in. "What are you doing down here at nearly eleven o'clock?" he asked cheerfully.

"I'm making some lemonade for Fanny," said Isabel briefly.

"What's the matter with Fanny? She should be asleep." The professor pulled out his watch and looked at it absently.

"She's all right; only a little upset," murmured Isabel.

"Over what? Has anything gone wrong?"

"No, nothing very important."

"Well, what's the trouble, then?" Fanny's happiness was very near to the professor's heart.

"Something I said hurt her feelings." Isabel was very intent on stirring the lemonade in the pitcher.

"You haven't been quarreling — have you?"

"I don't know whether it should be called that; we had 'words,' as they say." Isabel smiled grimly.

"I'm shocked to hear this." Professor Carleton's tone implied as much. "It seems very strange that two well-brought-up young women can't live in the same house without squabbling like — like guttersnipes."

"Oh, father, what a word!" Isabel dropped the glass which she was lifting from the cupboard shelf, and it fell splintered on the floor. She stood shrinking against the serving-table, her face pale with misery.

"It isn't a nice word." The professor had grown pale, too. "But the spectacle of two sisters quarreling is not exactly nice, either." Isabel had never heard her father speak in this way before.

"I'm terribly sorry for my part in it," she gasped; it seemed as if she had no voice. "I've said so a

hundred times. But I don't believe it was altogether and entirely my fault."

The professor's face softened. "The sort of life that young girls live in a busy college circle is too much of a strain," he said tenderly. "They try to do too much. But they ought to be able to keep their tempers, anyway."

"Yes, father." Isabel got a broom to sweep up the fragments of the glass.

"I'll do that." Her father took the broom out of her hand.

Isabel put the pitcher and a glass on a tray, and carried them upstairs.

The *contretemps* had assumed proportions beyond anything she could have expected. She thought of the time when she and Fanny had had that coldness over the losing of the pearl and coral ring. "We haven't had a real spat since," she comforted herself; "but this seems worse than that. I suppose it's because father didn't know about that, and his disapproval seems so unbearable."

Mrs. Carleton in her dressing-gown met her at the door of Fanny's room. Fanny was still whimpering, but her violent crying had stopped. "Shall I come in," whispered Isabel, "and help you to get her into bed?"

"No, I think I can do it alone." There was a kind of sternness in Mrs. Carleton's voice. "Go to bed. I don't think there's anything that you can do."

Isabel went to bed; but she lay awake till long after midnight. Her thoughts were not conducive to sleep. She questioned herself as to how this

mountain of resentment and distress had been reared out of nothing. Really, what she had said to Fanny was no worse than the little teasing things which she had blurted out, scores of times before. But perhaps that was the trouble — she had let herself go once too often. "I wouldn't have said those things — especially about the violin — to any one but my own sister," she admitted; "and why should I treat my sister worse than I would any one else? As a matter of fact, I ought to treat her better."

She thought regretfully, too, of the lovely spring days, and how perfect she had expected them to be. They had not all been ideal. There had been that misunderstanding with Meta; and then Meta's bitterness over her father's marriage; and now there was this absolutely useless wrangle with Fanny, and the general disturbance of the harmony of the family. "It's too bad," sighed Isabel, tossing in her bed. Only one more thing could happen, and that would be having a quarrel with Rodney. She fervently hoped she might be spared that!

The next day was one of strained discomfort. Fanny stayed in bed, and was waited on by the family. Every one spoke cheerfully to Isabel, but she had the distinct feeling that she was regarded as the cause of a very disagreeable family jar.

She did not go to Fanny's room, but worked hurriedly on her French theme, and then rushed to her classes. She took her lunch at the University cafeteria, so that she could use the noon recess for finishing her theme; she was to hand it in before four o'clock that afternoon.

She had just dropped it into the theme-box at her

French instructor's door, when a girl came up and spoke to her. Isabel remembered this girl as a Miss Turner, who had been in a class with her, earlier in the year. "You're Miss Carleton, aren't you?" asked Miss Turner.

"Yes," said Isabel, wondering what was wanted.

"You're secretary of the Mary Gaylor Ramsay Fund?"

"Yes." Isabel was alert now, for the Fund was a very important thing in her eyes.

"Well," hesitated Miss Turner, "I just thought I'd speak to you about a girl I know — Sylvia Calderwood, her name is. She needs help so badly. She was out of college a long time this winter, when her father died, and she lost so much time that she has to make it up in the summer session, in order to get her diploma —"

"Poor girl!" murmured Isabel. She was thinking about the lost father, not the lost time, nor the diploma.

"And she hasn't any money to go on with. She can't stay for the summer session. She says she'll have to go right to work at something, without finishing her college course."

"Oh, she mustn't do that," said Isabel quickly.

"I hope she won't have to. I — I thought the Fund might be able to help her."

"I wish it could," answered Isabel eagerly. "But I'm sure I don't see how we can." She thought of the few dollars left in the treasury. "Won't you give me her address? I'll go and see her."

The address was that of a house on West Thomp-

son Street, where rooms were undesirable and cheap.

"I might as well go now," said Isabel to herself. "It will take my mind off Fanny." She thanked Miss Turner, and after attending to a few small matters of her own, started down the hill on the side leading to West Thompson Street. As she walked along, she was thinking of what the Fund had accomplished during the year. Mrs. Everard had given her the names of several women who had signified a willingness to contribute a stated sum each year. Isabel had written many letters, in the midst of her busy life, and had spent many hours interviewing girls, and consulting with the other members of the Fund committee. She had rejoiced mightily when she had seen the good which the Fund was enabled to do for struggling girls; she went over the list of them in her mind, as she went on her search for Sylvia Calderwood. "I hope she isn't as badly off as Miss Turner thinks," she meditated.

The house was near the tracks, where the rush and tooting of switch-engines made a constant turmoil. Isabel found the number, among a row of dingy gray cottages soiled with car-smoke. She rang the bell, and a severe, poorly dressed woman came to the door.

"Yes, Miss Calderwood is in," said the woman, in answer to Isabel's question. "I guess you can go up. It's the back room."

Isabel climbed the stairs, and knocked at the door at the left of the narrow landing. The door was

opened by a slender girl in a shabby blue serge dress. With very gentle blue eyes she looked inquiringly at the stranger on the threshold.

"You're Miss Calderwood, aren't you?" began the caller. "I'm Isabel Carleton. Won't you let me come in and see you?"

"Why, of course." The girl responded to the friendliness in Isabel's face. "Come right in."

The little room, with its slanting ceiling and its one window looking out upon a waste of railroad tracks, was furnished meagerly; but the pictures and trinkets scattered about showed that Sylvia had come from a home of refinement.

"I'm going to say at once," Isabel began as she took the chair which was offered her, "that I'm secretary of the Mary Gaylor Ramsay Fund — my cousin, Mrs. Everard, started it."

"Yes, I've heard about it," said Sylvia. "It did so much for Eleanor Whiting."

"It helped her to stay on in school, and she won the Hylas prize for the short-story. Wasn't that splendid? She feels so encouraged, and her instructors in the English Department think she will be able to become a writer." Isabel's eyes shone at the mention of one of the Fund's successes. "A friend of yours told me about you," she continued. "And I thought I'd come in and see how you were getting on. You don't mind, do you?" She looked over and smiled at Sylvia. "We girls all want to help one another as much as we can."

"No, of course I don't mind." Sylvia had sat down on the edge of the bed, with her hands clasped

in her lap. "It's good of you. I've had a hard year — too hard, but I —" She stopped uncertainly.

"You get your diploma at this coming Commencement, don't you?" asked Isabel, to bring out the necessary explanations.

"No. I expected to, but I can't. You see, I was away so much when — my father —"

"Yes, I know," said Isabel.

"Well, I have to finish my work in the summer session." The girl was twisting her fingers nervously. "And I just can't scrape the money together. Mother and my younger sister have only enough to live on now, and we've scrimped and figured, but there isn't any money for me to go on with. Father had only a small salary, you know, and he and mother were sacrificing everything to get me through college; and his sickness took all he had saved —"

"I understand," said Isabel sympathetically. She had seen a good deal, this year, of people's ambitions and sacrifices.

"If I could only get through and have the diploma," Sylvia went on, "I could have a position in the high school in my home town — and I could live with mother and Leona." Her eyes lighted. "It would be so splendid, and my salary would help out so wonderfully. But the school board have a rule that they can't hire any one who hasn't a college diploma — it's all right, too, that they should be careful," she added, trying to be just, even in her disappointment.

"Oh, of course, quite right," said Isabel. She

was thinking of the pitiful scantiness of the Fund. She went over and sat down beside Sylvia on the bed. "I just feel sure," she said, in spite of her own misgivings, "that you won't have to give up getting your diploma. You *mustn't.*"

"But what am I to do?" asked Sylvia, with a wan smile. "There isn't *any* money, you know."

"We'll find some — rolling up hill in a barrel, as we used to say when we were youngsters. At least I'll see what the Fund can do. You'd take it from the Fund, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I would," Sylvia replied with gentle decisiveness. "I know it's for that purpose; and sometime I can pay it back, and help some other girl."

"That would be beautiful," said Isabel. She smiled hopefully as she left Sylvia, but in her heart she was gloomy enough. Her misery over Fanny had returned, and she was downcast at the thought that she might not be able to secure the sum of one hundred dollars which was the least that Sylvia could get along on, with the final expenses of her college course, and clothes sufficient for making a respectable appearance.

"I can't ask Cousin Eunice for any more," Isabel was thinking. "She gives to so many things. I don't know a soul that I could beg a hundred dollars from. If I'd only asked Meta to give me the money for the Fund, instead of decking me out with furbelows — that would have helped a good deal." She remembered with a pang the finery which she had accepted. "I can't ask mother — she could hardly spare what she gave in the winter; and Mrs. Mitchell

has contributed all she ought. Oh, dear, I wonder where it can come from."

She walked along disconsolately, up West Thompson Street, and then across into South Brooks Street. As she was passing a large pleasant house, she heard her name called, and stopped, looking to see who was greeting her. Harriet Plover ran out of the house and caught up with her. Harriet was beaming with happiness. "What do you think?" she said, taking hold of Isabel's arm affectionately. "I passed in that quiz in French that we had yesterday! I didn't get a very high standing, but I passed on a *Fair*. And that scheme about the verbs is helping me like everything, and Monsieur D'Albert told me that I'll get through in the course, if I keep on making up for lost time!"

She had been talking so fast that Isabel had not been able to get in a word. "I'm perfectly delighted," she exclaimed at last. "I knew you'd be all right. You must let me give you a good stiff review before the finals come on. I'm determined that you shall pass in that course."

"So am I," said Harriet. She had been walking along with Isabel. "The other courses are coming out all right. They're easier, and I am studying *like mad,* just as you said. Oh, Isabel Carleton, I am so grateful to you."

"Nonsense," said Isabel, without smiling. She felt humiliated that she should pose as a philanthropist to Harriet, when she had quarreled with her own sister. She felt very small and humble and useless just then.

"It isn't 'nonsense,' either," returned Harriet. "But you look awfully down in the mouth to-day. What is the matter? You're always so cheerful."

"I feel a little depressed," admitted Isabel, though she could not tell Harriet all her troubles. "I was just regretting as I came along, that I hadn't a wishing-ring or a fairy wand or something. I need money for the Fund."

"Oh, the Molly Ramsay Fund — some of the girls told me about it." Harriet looked grave. "Miss Ramsay was your friend?"

"Yes — my dearest friend." It was hard for Isabel to speak of Molly, even now, after two years.

"The Fund has done a lot of good, hasn't it?" said Harriet quickly, looking away, so as not to see the tears in Isabel's eyes.

"We think so. It has saved a number of girls this year from overworking or from having to go home. We thought we shouldn't have any more demands on us till fall; but now I find that there's a girl who needs help very badly — to get through the summer school and get her diploma. And our money is all gone."

"What a shame!" Harriet looked concerned. "There ought to be some money somewhere." Harriet had not had to worry much about money in her short career.

"I don't see now where it's coming from," Isabel rejoined. "But perhaps it will turn up. There's a lot of it in the world."

"It doesn't always seem to get to the right people," said Harriet, more thoughtfully than was her

custom. "Well, I must go back. But I did want to let you know about the standing in French, and when I saw you going by, I just ran right out."

"I'm glad you did," answered Isabel. "Come over and see us, won't you?"

"Yes, I will." Harriet left Isabel at a corner.

"I do hope Fanny is herself again," thought Isabel, as she neared the house. But Fanny was not to be seen, and the door of her room was closed. Isabel went to her room, to change her gown after a strenuous day; then she went to her mother's room. Mrs. Carleton was combing her hair. She had evidently been lying down on the sofa at the foot of the bed. "Mother, how's Fanny?" asked Isabel abruptly.

"She's better." Mrs. Carleton put in the last hair-pin, and took up a hand-glass. "She's really all right. But I thought she needed a good rest, so I made her stay in bed to-day."

"Then it's all straightened out, isn't it?" said Isabel with relief. "I'm willing to apologize till I'm blue in the face. And I'm glad to know that it's all right."

Mrs. Carleton laid down the glass. "Well, it isn't, exactly," she said slowly. "Fanny says she won't touch her violin again, as long as you're here, and doing your work in college."

"Oh! She can't mean that!" Isabel started and flushed.

"You know how she is. If she makes up her mind to a thing, wild horses can't change it."

"But, mother, that's preposterous. She can't

give up her music. She has made such a wonderful start, and she's just at the age when she must get her technique, and get it right."

"We all know that," Mrs. Carleton replied. She began taking off her muslin blouse. "Won't you get me a silk blouse out of the box on the closet shelf, dear?"

Isabel brought the blouse mechanically. "But, mother, she must practice, and make all the progress that she can."

"Well, perhaps she will relent when she sees how foolish such a notion is," said Mrs. Carleton, not very hopefully. "I'm sorry this thing happened, but we can't help it now."

Dinner was very silent. Fanny did not come down. Professor Carleton kept up a perfunctory conversation, and his wife and daughter answered in as animated a manner as they could. Celia was having dinner with Milly Mitchell; and so her lively chatter was missing. Melissy's face seemed to have become thinner, and her sharp eyes rested on Isabel accusingly. She was very fond of Fanny.

Isabel studied all the evening, and went to bed early, turning over in her mind the horror of Fanny's resolve, and racking her brain to think of some way of getting the money for Sylvia. In the morning, her mother came in to say, "Don't mention this affair to Fanny at all. Just let it blow over." Isabel was very glad to take this advice. There was a constraint between the girls at breakfast, but they both slipped out of the house as early as possible, with the excuse of school duties.

The day would have been another gloomy one for Isabel, if something very thrilling had not happened, just as she was leaving Main Hall at noon. Harriet Plover came up to her with a mysterious look on her face, and drew her aside, behind the pillars of the portico.

"There's something I want to say," she began breathlessly. "You know, I do feel so grateful to you, Isabel, and I wanted to do something to show it. Now there's a way for me to do it."

"How?" asked Isabel. "But you know you don't need to on my account," she said hastily.

"Oh, I want to. Well, mother sent me fifty dollars to get some clothes, and go to a house-party at Lake Kegonsah — she suspected that things hadn't been very pleasant, and she wanted to console me, I guess. And I'd — I'd like to give you the fifty dollars, to help that girl that you were telling me about, yesterday."

"Oh, Harriet!" Isabel took hold of the younger girl's arm. "That would be too splendid for words. But are you *sure* you want to give it up?" She spoke more uncertainly, for she knew Harriet's love of pretty clothes, and she feared the girl might regret her first enthusiasm.

"It's as little as I can do," returned Harriet, her eyes shining with the pleasure of sacrifice. "I can get along without the new clothes. I can see that I've thought too much about those things, anyway. And I do want that girl to finish her college course, and get the position that she's longing for!"

"Oh, I do, too — so much," cried Isabel. "This

money will make all the difference in the world to her. She's just scrimped and gone without, and gone without, until it seems as if she couldn't give up another thing. Harriet, this is lovely of you, and I thank you ever and ever so much for doing this. 'Great will be your reward in heaven,'" she added, half laughing.

"I'll just transfer the check to you," said Harriet. "And then you can have it cashed and put it through the machinery of the Fund. Can you come back to the office for a minute?" She drew the slip of paper from her purse.

They turned back into the building, and went to the Registrar's office, where they could get pen and ink for the financial transaction. They both looked very happy as they came out of the doorway again, and walked down the Hill together.

"Things aren't all bad," Isabel was thinking. "Now, if all these other tangles will only straighten themselves out as easily, how thankful, how awfully thankful I shall be!"

But when she got home, just before lunch, she heard Fanny telephoning to Herr Reuter. "I can't take my lesson to-day," Fanny was saying. "No, not to-morrow; no, not next week. I'm not going to take any more lessons — not for a long time — two or three years, probably." She was giving cool replies to what evidently were scandalized protests from her teacher.

Isabel ran upstairs, so that Fanny might not know she had heard. She had a lump of grief and anger in her throat. "She can't mean it," she kept saying

to herself. "She wouldn't be so silly. She just wants to punish me for what I said." But in her heart she knew that Fanny was very likely to stick to her resolve.

CHAPTER XIII

APPREHENSIONS

"META HOUSTON isn't afraid of anything, is she?" said Caroline Harper to Isabel, as they paused between classes. She was referring to the play in which Meta was to appear. "She'd just as soon appear on the stage as on the campus, I believe."

"She really is rather shy," said Isabel. "But she's proud, too, and puts on a bravado that she doesn't always feel."

"It hardly seems so," Caroline answered. "She acts as if she didn't care a rap for any one's opinion. I think it's stunning, the way she strides along and keeps her chin up — I admire her immensely; but she does seem haughty and indifferent."

"Well, she isn't. I can't help what she seems," said Isabel. Meta and Caroline had never got on very well together, and Meta had a trick of hiding her real self, if she thought a person critical or unsympathetic.

A little later, Isabel was in Meta's room, having a hurried gossip, for they were both so busy that they had little time for talk. Meta suddenly put her hand on Isabel's arm, with a nervous gesture. "You'll stand by me, won't you?" she said. "I just know I'm going to fail." She was living in a

constant dread of failure, and of burning worry over her father's marriage.

"I'll be your prop and stay," responded Isabel. "But how any one can worry, when she has a gown like the corn-colored tulle, to wear in the last act, is more than I can see." The dress had been finished, and sent home, and was now lying on Meta's bed. "It couldn't be prettier if Lady Duff-Gordon had made it."

"Well, what's the use of having a yellow dress, if you have to have a step-mother, too?" inquired Meta whimsically.

"There are very much worse things," said Isabel with severity. "I can see in your eyes that you've heard more about her, and that you've been keeping it from me."

"I have heard," admitted Meta, rather shame-faced. "She's been at the head of a girls' school in Seattle. Father met her at somebody's house, and liked her and went to see her, and —"

"And now they're going to be happy ever after," Isabel finished, when Meta hesitated.

"Probably. She can't be so very dreadful," said Meta slowly.

"Oh, shame! She must be fine. I know you'll like her. Has she written to you?" Isabel was relentless.

"Y-yes, she's written me, of course."

"Was it a nice letter?"

"Oh, it was all right. She said what any one would say under the circumstances, I suppose."

"What was that?"

"You know — that she wanted me to like her,

and all that. Why should she expect me to?" Meta's anger was flaming up again. "She's never done anything to make me like her. She takes my father away from me, and then writes in that smug way that she wants me to be fond of her. Not I. I won't pretend to, either."

Isabel was distressed. "Can't you assume a virtue if you have it not?" she asked.

"I couldn't if I wanted to. But I won't be such a hypocrite."

"Not even to please your father?" To Isabel, pleasing one's father was almost the greatest consideration in the world.

"Has he tried to please me? And anyway, you'd be the last to approve me if I went in for hypocrisy, Miss Carleton."

"Of course, Lady Clara Vere de Vere. But why be a hypocrite? Like the poor soul all you can. She hasn't the easiest time on earth, trying to be a mother to a high-headed minx who fights off every attempt at friendliness."

"So that's what I am, am I — a high-headed minx!" Meta drew away from Isabel. Her cheeks were scarlet, and her head was high indeed. She walked to the window, and stood looking out.

Isabel was a bit scared at her own boldness, but she stood her ground. "What I said wasn't an atom too strong, and I won't take it back," she thought. She waited for Meta to speak.

Meta turned, and pulled Isabel down on the sofa beside her. "Oh, you're not going to desert me, are you, Goldilocks?" she questioned tremulously.

"Desert you? Never while I breathe!" Isabel

was relieved at Meta's change of mood. "I couldn't do that. But I want you to make yourself and other people as happy as possible."

"You ask the impossible," Meta pouted.

"Very well. Let's not say anything more about it. Are they going to be — married soon?"

"To-morrow."

"Oh! And they're coming on here?"

"In time for the play — a day or two before, and then they'll stay till it's over." Meta was staring at the carpet. "Father says I'm not to meet them at the station. I suppose he thinks it might be embarrassing. They'll leave their luggage at the hotel, and then come up here to see me."

"That ought to work out well enough. You'll find that everything will be all right, Meta," said Isabel optimistically.

"It's easy for you to think so," muttered Meta. Isabel felt reproved. Other people's troubles did seem a good deal simpler and more readily disposed of than her own!

She began to chatter very fast about the impending examinations, and the festivities which crowded in toward the end of the school year.

Things at home had settled down to a constrained appearance of harmony. Fanny was back in school, but seemed unusually quiet and subdued. Her color was not so high as it had been; her eyes, when they met Isabel's, were cool and staring, or else they showed a pained expression and turned suddenly away. For several days there was nothing said about the late unpleasantness. The violin was silent. Fanny studied her high school lessons in-

dustriously, read aloud to Celia, and performed more little tasks than usual, about the house. Isabel had an aching sense of guilt, although she still could not agree that she had been entirely in the wrong.

After dinner on Monday, Professor Carleton said gravely, " Don't you want to play a little for us, Fanny, before we scatter? "

Fanny looked up from the nut which she was cracking. " I'd rather not, father," she said stiffly. " Please excuse me."

" What if I don't excuse you? " answered the professor in a stern way which was unusual with him.

" You must, father." Fanny put down the nut without eating it. Her chin quivered, and her breast was heaving ominously.

" Oh, very well," said Professor Carleton hurriedly, as if he feared another hysterical outburst. " But I hope you'll think better of this, my child."

Fanny did not answer, but got up and left the table. Mrs. Carleton's eyes followed her mournfully.

" Can't anything be done? " asked Professor Carleton, in an irritated tone. " This is too painful. I can't understand it."

" It's so needless," wailed Isabel. " There's no reason in the world why she should act like this."

" I can't believe it will go on," said Mrs. Carleton. " I'll try arguing with Fanny, as soon as I can. Perhaps I'm cowardly, but I can't stand seeing her cry."

" No doubt a few days of letting up on her music will do her good," said the professor. " But I wish it might have come about in some other way."

For consolation, during these vexatious days, Isabel fled to her garden. Rodney came over, late the next afternoon, and was helping to clear away the weeds which had sprung up after a warm rain.

"The weeds make a better showing than the plants," complained Isabel. "They work so hard to get their share of air and earth that I feel almost cruel in pulling them up."

"I don't," Rodney answered sharply. "They're out of place, and so they have to go — and good riddance. That view of yours is purely sentimental."

"I believe it is," conceded Isabel, stopping in the process of weeding, to stare thoughtfully at the ground. "I don't want to be a sentimentalist. That means that one ignores a larger issue for the picturesque appeal of a smaller one."

"Yes, that's a good way to define it. It's like the people who shed tears over the imaginary sufferings of an ant, and then forget to give the cow a good drink of water."

"Well, here go the weeds, then." Isabel began vigorous onslaughts upon the intruders. "And may they wither away into nothingness!"

"So say I," supplemented Rodney.

They worked on silently for a while, as the wind rustled the branches of the trees at the foot of the yard. "I heard indirectly from Mr. Shelburne," said Isabel, speaking of what was in her thoughts. "You know, I've told you a number of times about Mr. Shelburne, whom I met down at Tibbles Green, when I was in England."

"Yes, I know. What's the news about him?"

Rodney had never been very keen for hearing about Edwin Shelburne.

"He's been awfully fortunate in getting through safely, so far. He wrote a long letter to Mrs. Grellock — she was Miss Brookert, you know — and she sent the letter on to me. It was written about a month ago, of course — but he was all right then."

"Where was he?"

"On leave, in Paris. He's been through some fearful experiences. It seems hideous to think of — he was such a quiet cultivated young man — to be in such dreadful conditions — such horrors —" Isabel grew incoherent. Rodney worked intently, without saying anything. "But he says," Isabel went on, "that the later stages of the war won't be so hard on the soldiers, for everybody will be better prepared."

"Let us hope so!" breathed Rodney fervently.

"He says a good deal about the wonderful fight the Canadians have put up. He thinks that when the war is over, he'd like to come out and settle in Canada — or the United States, even, if the Americans are anything like the Canadians. Of course, Mr. Grellock is a Canadian, and Mr. Shelburne is devoted to him."

"He has yet to see what the Americans can do," said Rodney, pulling out a weed with unnecessary vigor.

"And he says,"— Isabel spoke slowly, almost painfully —"he's sure we'll be in it before it's over."

Rodney stood up suddenly. Isabel, crouching between the rows of marigolds, looked up at him

anxiously. "You don't think so, do you?" she asked.

"*Yes, I think so.* But I don't know that my opinion counts for any more than Mr. Wilson's. He hasn't consulted me as to my views on the subject." Rodney smiled down at Isabel.

"*I* think it will be over before we have to get into it," cried Isabel, clasping her hands. "I feel sure it will. We can't have war. Why, the United States has always been such a peaceable nation, and left everybody else free to go their own way. We don't want anybody's territory, we don't want anybody's glory. All we want is to be let alone." Isabel had risen now, and was facing Rodney with a sort of defiance.

"That's all very well," answered Rodney solemnly; "but there comes a time when people have to want more than just to be let alone. There are a good many more values in a nation's life than that. A big world power has its duty to the world."

"Yes, of course," said Isabel. "But —"

"Don't be a sentimentalist, Isabel," retorted Rodney. "Don't ignore the larger issue because of the appeal of the smaller one."

"Oh, Rod, it might mean — so much!" Isabel burst out.

"Yes. It might." Rodney's face was hard. "Little individuals don't count in the great sweep of democratic ideals."

"I suppose not." Isabel was quiet for a moment. Then she said contritely, "I don't want to be small and selfish." Her eyes sought the young man's.

"You won't be, when the time comes." His eyes met hers reassuringly.

They stood very still, thinking what "the time" might mean.

"Well, anyway," Rodney went on, as they went back to their weeding, "I must be getting ready. I can't spend my time this summer in camping and fishing. Mother insisted on my doing that last summer, because I had worked so hard during the year, especially catching up all that I had lost in the fall. So I may have needed an outing. But this year there's no excuse."

"Not when there's so much to be done in the world as there is now," Isabel agreed. "Doesn't the University have plenty of jobs to offer to the Engineering students?"

"There are a lot of places for the fellows who are graduating; but of course they get the first chances. And a good many people don't want to hire a man just for the summer. They want some one who is likely to stay on, if he's any good at all."

"Yes, I see. Well, I'm like George Burnham. I think there's a place for everybody."

"Thanks for your optimism. Hi, there's Fanny."

Fanny was coming down the path with a plate in her hand. It was a part of her martyrdom that she should behave in many particulars as if nothing had happened. And besides, she had taken violently to cooking, of late. "I thought the farmers might be hungry," she said generously. "I was making some oat-meal cookies, and I brought you

some." She offered the spicy brown discs, on a pink plate.

"How perfectly sa-lu-brious!" exulted Isabel. "I'm half starved. A thousand thanks, and then some." She helped herself to a cooky, trying not to be self-conscious in Fanny's presence.

"Fanny, you're a real little cook from Cookville," exclaimed Rodney with no simulated enthusiasm. "You're an angel of mercy, to feed the horny-handed sons and daughters of the soil!" He began to eat his cooky with avidity.

"I only brought two apiece," Fanny explained. "They go so fast, anyway."

"Good reason," said Rodney with his mouth full. "We'll excuse you for not bringing more, considering the size and greediness of the family, and the skill of the cook."

"How goes the Battle of the Back-Yard?" asked Fanny, gazing about somewhat disdainfully on the scattered and wilting weeds. She looked very dainty in her white linen dress.

"The Pig-Weeds have gone down, with fearful slaughter," reported Rodney, "and the Grub-Worms are in retreat."

"General Fox led the attack, ably seconded by Captain Carleton," laughed Isabel. "We're going to fight it out on this line, if it takes all summer."

"Don't break your backs at it," advised Fanny coolly, as she turned to go into the house with the empty plate.

"How's Fanny getting along?" asked Rodney, finishing his second cooky.

Isabel flushed and bent over a row of snap-

dragons. "I haven't told you," she began slowly; "it's worrying me like everything. It seems as if I always have some trouble to hold up for your inspection. Fan and I have had a dreadful quarrel."

"Hm," said Rodney, "I thought things hadn't seemed quite the same. What was it all about, anyway?"

"Well, I hardly know. One things leads on to another. I said something that wasn't very kind, and she took it harder than I expected."

"Things do go like that. You remember how little there really was to our hard feelings last fall," answered Rodney.

"Yes, nothing but foolishness and pride."

"I'll bet it's the same now. Do make it up if you can. Fanny's such a little trump. Her artistic temperament gives her a lot of character, and I suppose it's that that makes her able to play so well."

"I know I ought to take that into consideration. And I have, too. I've done everything I could. Mother said she thought it was best just to let things blow over. The worst is, now, that Fanny appears all right on the outside, so there's nothing one can say." She felt as if she couldn't tell Rodney how Fanny had resolved to play no more. "Do you think I'm a terrible termagant, Rod?" she asked gloomily. "I didn't have any idea of making so much trouble."

"Of course I don't think you a what-you-may-call-it," Rodney answered with scorn for the supposition. "I know what it is to blurt out something you don't mean, and then hear it echoing down the corridors of time, until you think it'll drive you

crazy. Don't take it any more seriously than you have to."

Isabel tried to act upon this advice, especially as her time was so occupied with preparing for the final examinations, and taking part in various college festivities that she could not worry "so much as she wanted to," as she put it to herself with a sardonic smile.

It was the custom at Jefferson to have a Spring Festival on the Upper Campus on some selected evening at the very last of May. This year, Isabel was one of the girls who were to take part in drills and dances of which the Festival chiefly consisted. It was something of a sacrifice to give the extra time to this event. Isabel had a small solo dance to prepare, which, however, did not give her a great deal of apprehension, since the steps were easy for her, and the time of practice went in with her regular gymnasium work.

On the evening of the Festival, the weather was fortunately perfect. The Carletons, like every one else, had an early dinner, so that they might hurry away. Even before they had finished, the sound of tramping feet could be heard: Crowds were going early, for there were no reserved seats, and the rows of camp chairs filled very soon.

Isabel did not even wait for her dessert. "I'll run on, mother," she said, "so that I shan't be the one to keep the girls waiting."

"Very well. We'll all be starting in a few moments," Mrs. Carleton replied, "for we want to have good seats, where we can see you."

As Isabel hastened up the Hill, a fresh breeze was blowing from the lake, and slanting lines of light fell through the trees on the sloping sward where the crowd was assembling.

In the gymnasium, the girls were running about, getting their wands and garlands for the drills, putting their wraps into lockers, rearranging their hair, and preening themselves like a flock of white birds.

Iola Fleming was looking unusually attractive in a soft white voile gown, with a blue sash which was a part of the glory of a certain figure in one of the dances. "Wonderful weather," she said fervently to Isabel (Iola was usually fervent). "Are you worried about your solo?"

"What would there be to worry about?" answered Isabel in the aggressively practical tone which she was tempted to use with Iola. "I know the steps, and I am not so important a part of the affair that I need to think much about myself."

"Well, I always think that when one gets a chance to express oneself in an art-form in public, she ought to make the most of it," sighed Iola, putting up her hand to her carefully waved hair. "I told you I'm to be class poet, didn't I?"

"Yes, you told me," Isabel replied; a spray of paper apple-blossoms had come loose on her garland, and she was fastening the end of the wire.

"It's such an opportunity to show what one can do, and to express one's real self in the highest form of art," Iola went on. She was fond of using phrases which seemed to mean something distinguished.

"You're sure it's the highest form of art, are

you?" smiled Isabel, who had now made the spray fast to the foundation.

Iola opened her eyes wide. "Poetry? Why, of course."

"Perhaps she means *your* poetry," said Caroline Harper shrewdly. She was standing near, in a very effective costume, representing that of a Tyrolean peasant. She was to take part in a folk dance.

"I didn't mean anything in particular," Isabel hastened to say, for she surmised that she had meant just what Caroline had suggested. "How nice you look, Caro. Those peasant costumes are so charming. I wish we could wear them all the time. They're a lot nicer than the silly clothes we wear. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do," said Caroline. She had improved greatly in the last two years. Her face was smoother and kindlier, and her figure was more shapely. "I think women's clothes are dreadfully silly as they are now, and so expensive. Don't you think it would create a sensation if I walked into class in this rig?"

"I suppose so," admitted Isabel; "but I don't see why we can't wear what we want to, within reason. Conventionality is the bane of life."

"Let's all try wearing what we like," said Caroline, who disliked to give up the becoming costume which she was wearing.

"Yes, our families would be so pleased!" responded Isabel.

"Oh, there's the signal!" cried some of the girls.

The groups that were to be in the first part of the performance marched out upon the campus, between

the Law Building and Old South Hall. Men ushers in caps and gowns were hurrying stragglers into advantageous positions, and waving back spectators who pressed too far forward upon the sward reserved for the dances. A bevy of men students were giving a sky-rocket for the President of the University, who was just taking the seat which had been kept for him. He was a large man with bent shoulders and a dark bushy beard which gave him the look of a farmer in his best clothes.

Siss-s-s-s! Boom! Ah-h-h-h-h — Prexy! the shout went up. The President tried to look as Mr. Roosevelt says he does when he is being introduced from the platform —" like an absent rabbit."

" Heavenly evening," whispered the girl at Isabel's elbow. Iola and Caroline had gone with their respective groups.

It was not yet dusk, and yet a softness had settled over the campus. Even the scrape of the street-cars turning the corner at the foot of the Hill seemed subdued and unassertive.

Quiet came over the crowd. A small orchestra began a marching tune. The Maypole, with its gay streamers, stood in the center of the sward. A line of girls filed out silently on the grass, their white gowns vivid against the green. Isabel, at the head of the line, stepped forward and lifted the first streamer; the others followed, holding out the streamers like the stripes of a tent. Then, with a quick rhythmic motion, they began to tread in and out, winding the streamers into a criss-cross pattern on the pole. Slowly the pattern crept down, while the complicated twistings and treadings con-

tinued, till at last the dancers stood in concentric circles against the pole, which was clothed in the gay pattern of the intermingled stripes.

And then the music changed. The girls set their faces in the opposite direction, and began to unwind the streamers, with beautiful undulating motions, showing the graceful turns of arm and shoulder, and the quick fluttering of skirts blown about by a gust from the lake. At last they dropped the streamers and fled from the scene, to the sharp clapping of hands.

Now there was an excellent drill of girls with colored wands. Then came the figure which Isabel loved, a spring dance of maidens with garlands of pink flowers. She mingled with the dancers in a trance of delight. In and out and round and round they moved, with a multiplicity of intricate steps. Then they flowed back, and formed a half-circle, with arms interlaced, and garlands festooned from arm to arm.

Isabel tripped forward into the half-circle, her white dress and pink wreath starring the now darkening grass. Her solo was a light nymph-like dance of swift moods and changes, varying to the throb of the music. Back and forth she trod, in ecstatic abandon; and while she danced, another girl came out from the circle, and joined hands with Isabel; then another, so that the trio beat the grass with noiseless feet. At a call in the music, the others swept forward and enveloped the three; and so the dance circled itself out in a cloud of girlish shapes.

Isabel, panting lightly, sat down on the edge of the sidewalk, to watch the next number, the folk-

dance in which Caroline was taking part. Other dances followed in their order, and then came the final drill. By this time the darkness had begun to settle down upon the festival-makers. Arc lights burned yellow through the trees, buzzing and muttering, while great beetles hovered round the glow.

The shadows between the buildings had become caverns. A cold wind blew in across the campus. Isabel shivered in her thin white gown. The musicians were playing from memory, for they could not see their notes.

The concluding dance was an odd sober rhythm, which died out slowly while the dancers flitted by twos and threes into the shadows. The music sank lower and lower, fitting itself to the deepening shades. With the last low *thrum-m-m,* the last naiad-like figures disappeared, and for a moment the audience sat breathless, under the spell of the twilight. Then there was a sudden movement. The shoving of chairs mixed with the chatter of praise. The crowd was breaking up, and hastening away.

A voice spoke behind Isabel. "I was lucky to find you in all this pow-wow." Rodney Fox stood at her side, with a light wrap over his arm.

"Oh, Rod! you startled me," cried the girl, who had not yet quite come back from the absorption of the last dance.

"Your mother sent this coat. She brought it along, in case you might be cold, and she asked me to find you," said Rodney.

"She must have thought you a sleuth." Isabel slipped her arms into the coat, and drew its comforting warmth around her shoulders. "Oh, that

feels good. I left my sweater in my locker at the Gym. I shan't bother to get it to-night."

An attendant was gathering up the garlands and wands, so that the girls might not have to go back to the Gymnasium, for this was a study-night.

"I liked your dance," said Rodney simply.

"Oh, did you? I'm glad." Isabel replied somewhat absently, though Rodney's praise was always sweet to her.

They walked on over the swell of the Hill, and down the curving walk to University Avenue. The greater part of the crowd had gone the other way, down State Street. The smell of the water, of the freshly cut grass, and of a wild grape vine in bloom were vaguely mixed in Isabel's mind. Rodney was as silent as she, while they made their way through the brilliant spaces of light thrown by the arc lamps, and the black shadows under the trees.

"Come on in and have something," suggested Rodney, when they came to the shining front of the drug store on the corner, where young men and women were crowding in for ice cream and soft drinks.

"I don't mind. I didn't have any dessert," Isabel assented.

They went in and sat up at the marble counter. College students in white linen coats (boys who were "working their way through") were serving the thirsty groups. Isabel ate her orange-ice without saying much. The bright lights, and the inconsequential chatter seemed out of place, for she was still under the spell of the dance in which she had taken part.

"How's Fanny? Any relaxation of her stern resolve?" asked Rodney more seriously than his words would indicate.

"None whatever. Any signs of a job?"

"Nothing on the horizon."

When they reached home, Isabel was rather glad that Rodney could not come in. "I've got to study like a savage," he explained. "Carmichael is going to give us a terror of a quiz to-morrow."

Isabel went on into the house, and slipped upstairs to her room without going into the sitting-room. She did not wish to talk, or to lose the happiness which the evening had given her.

CHAPTER XIV

THE STEP-MOTHER

META was so busy during these last days that she had not much time to brood over her father's marriage; but she had fits of gloom, and long lapses into silence which Isabel found very difficult and vexing. Meta had said little or nothing about the approaching visit of her father and step-mother, and Isabel was hoping that she herself might not be drawn into the first meeting. It seemed to have been so arranged that she could exclude herself without difficulty.

However, she was not to escape so easily. Late one afternoon, she was working hard on the last French theme of the year, when she was interrupted by a call to the telephone. The voice that came over the wire was Meta's, but unusually strained and tremulous.

"Won't you come over?" asked Meta.

"Now, do you mean?" answered Isabel.

"Pretty soon. About train-time."

"Why, I don't know. Are you sure that you want me?" Isabel disliked refusing, but she had a real dread of this family complication of the Houstons'.

"Yes. I've decided that I want you here when they come."

"Oh, Meta, I don't want to intrude," cried Isabel. "I'm sure they would think me in the way."

"No, they wouldn't. They'd be immensely relieved to find some one else here. I'm certain of that."

"I'm not so certain. I'd be glad to be there, if I could help you any, you know. But I'd only make things worse." Isabel found herself yielding, but she was determined not to give in without a struggle.

"Do come," pleaded Meta. "I'm in a perfect panic." And then she added accusingly, "You promised not to desert me, you know."

"All right. I'll come," said Isabel. "How soon?"

"In half an hour." Meta's tone showed her relief.

"I'll be there."

"Thank you."

Isabel hastily finished the first draught of her French paper, and put on her hat to run over to Meta's. She found her friend sitting before her study table, fingering her books and papers. She sprang up as Isabel appeared at the open door of the sitting-room. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you!" she cried.

"I don't see what I can do in a case like this," said Isabel soberly.

"You don't have to *do*. You can just *be*. They'll be here in a minute. The train came in quite a while ago. I telephoned to the station." Isabel stood looking out of the window. The room was quiet, except for the nervous tapping of Meta's

foot against the floor. Then they heard the crunching of a taxicab on the gravel in front of the house, and the whir of the motor. "There they are!" said Meta calmly; but she was pale and breathless. "I didn't think it would make me feel so," she said apologetically, with a catch in her voice.

"I'll wait here," said Isabel.

Meta ran downstairs, and Isabel could hear only the confusion of greetings — the resonant voice of a man, the low pleasant voice of a woman, Meta's hurried words. "Oh, I hope it's all right!" Isabel was hopping up and down, with her hands tightly clasped.

Now the others were coming up the stairs, and Isabel caught a few perfunctory phrases about the train, the hotel, the disposal of luggage. The woman who entered the next minute was not young. She was a slender, almost frail lady, with soft brown hair and blue eyes. She wore a traveling suit of dark blue silk, and a very handsome hat with white plumes. As she stood in the door, she looked earnestly at Isabel. Behind her came Meta and her father, who looked like the picture on Meta's dresser, though more interesting. His eyes were dark and searching, and his clipped mustache showed a firm but rather melancholy mouth. He wore excellently fitting clothes; and Isabel noted the cluster of diamonds in his black satin tie.

"This is my best friend, Isabel Carleton," said Meta in a constrained voice. Isabel felt at once the awkwardness of a situation which was not "all right."

"We're very happy to know Meta's friend."

Mrs. Houston extended a cordial hand. Isabel liked the sincerity of her tone and gesture.

"Meta has told me about you many times," said Mr. Houston, giving Isabel's hand a firm, quick squeeze. "I believe she lives with the Carleton family more than she does here."

"I've certainly enjoyed knowing Meta," returned Isabel, trying not to feel the distinct coolness in the air. "I could shake Meta!" she was thinking, while she murmured another polite phrase or two.

"Sit down," said Meta with an effort, to Mrs. Houston; "and won't you take off your jacket? Find a chair, father."

"We aren't going to stay just now," answered Mr. Houston gravely. "It's almost dinner time. We want you and Miss Carleton to go to dinner with us at the hotel. We can have a visit down there." His eyes were not skillful in concealing the hurt which his daughter's very evident hard feeling had caused.

"That would be splendid," responded Isabel quickly. "But are you sure that I shan't be an intrusion?"

"We want you," said Mrs. Houston gently. Isabel saw that Meta had been right. The newcomers were both relieved at the presence of a fourth person.

"I shall have to telephone mother," said Isabel.

"And I must get my hat on," said Meta. She turned to go into her bedroom. Isabel, watching Mrs. Houston, saw a look of wistful eagerness in the woman's face. There was a little hurt there, too, but a patient willingness not to be grieved until she was forced to be.

"She's longing to have Meta love her!" Isabel thought. She took up the desk telephone, and called her mother. "Is that you, Mumsey?" she said. "Well, you know who this is. Mr. and Mrs. Houston have asked me to go to the Park Hotel for dinner. Is that all right? . . . I thought you wouldn't mind. . . . Yes, I'll be home early. . . . Did you have a good time at the tea-party? . . . I'm glad of that. See you soon. Good-by."

Meta came out of the bedroom, putting on her gloves. Her straight haughty young figure had grown more unyielding since she had been alone in the other room. Her face had a frozen look which horrified Isabel. "I'm ready," said Meta. "I don't want to hurry you, of course —"

"You have pleasant rooms here, haven't you?" said Mrs. Houston, rising.

"Yes, I think I'm very fortunate," rejoined Meta, looking about the comfortable apartment in a business-like way. Her eyes would not meet her stepmother's.

"Nothing is too good for our girl," commented Mr. Houston, fixing a sharp gaze on his daughter's face.

"Nice old Dad," said Meta, going over and slipping her hand under his arm. It seemed as if she had begun to soften a bit; but after all her words and the slightly caressing motion served only to emphasize Meta's antagonism toward her new mother.

They all went on downstairs. The taxicab had been waiting, the engine panting impatiently. Very silently they settled themselves inside, and the car whisked them away to the hotel.

In the dining room they were given a table at the side near a window. The conversation at first was fragmentary, and chiefly concerned with the orders to the waiter. When the waiter had gone, and hopeless constraint seemed to be settling down upon the party again, Isabel cast desperately about for something to say. "Have you ever been in Jefferson before?" she asked, turning to Mr. Houston.

"Yes, I was here, over night, nearly two years ago," answered Mr. Houston easily. "That was when Meta first came here. But I really didn't see much of the town. I had business to attend to in Chicago, if I remember correctly, and was in something of a hurry."

"You didn't see the University?"

"I just had a glimpse of it. To tell the truth —" he smiled a little —"I didn't think Meta would stay long. I thought it was just a whim of hers, coming here, you know. I had an idea she'd be in a hurry to get back to her dramatic school, or perhaps go on to New York."

"People who come to Jefferson usually find it hard to get away," laughed Isabel. "It's the nicest place in the world, you know."

But Meta had begun to speak. "I found that if people are going to do anything worth while in the world, it's better for them to have a good education behind it," she said, looking at her father, and still avoiding her step-mother's eyes.

"You agree with her, I'm sure," said Isabel, in order to include Mrs. Houston in what was being said.

"I'm a great believer in education for women,"

answered the lady, who had been sitting very quietly. "You know I've been managing a girls' school, myself. It was rather a hard thing for me to come away before commencement; but things were almost finished, and my assistant was willing to carry out my plans."

Here the soup was brought. As the waiter withdrew, Isabel said, more to make talk than anything else, "And are you giving up your school altogether?"

Mrs. Houston looked over at her husband, and smiled dubiously. "I haven't done so yet," she answered, as if she scarcely knew what to say. "I don't believe I shall. I want to go on directing it."

"Why shouldn't you?" said Isabel eagerly. "The girls need you, I'm sure. I never could see why a woman should have to give up all her own interests, just because she was married."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Houston. "But my husband isn't quite convinced. I think he has an idea that he is saving me from having to work. He can't understand that a woman could really *want* to work, when she didn't have to."

"A lot of men don't see that," Meta broke out, unable to resist a subject on which she had violent opinions. "It's time for Dad to begin."

"Score one for Mrs. Houston," thought Isabel. "She's getting respected, at least, for not wanting to be what Meta calls a 'parasite female.'"

"Dad'll have to think it over, if two members of his family insist on it," said Mr. Houston, glad to have Meta taking part in the conversation. "He

may be a trifle old-fashioned, but he's ready to be converted."

"He hasn't told you, I think," said Mrs. Houston to Meta, "that things are working out so that he can make a permanent home in Seattle, and not have to go about so much."

"Those new men that I've been training to manage things have turned out better than I supposed they were going to," added Mr. Houston.

"Oh, that's good, father," said Meta, hardly knowing whether to be pleased or not.

"That's one reason why I can go on with my school," said Mrs. Houston to Isabel, under her breath, while Meta was questioning her father about his new prospects.

"Don't give up the ship!" murmured Isabel to the lady. They both relished the little flavor of conspiracy in the whispered words.

The changing of plates broke the conversation, and there was a season of desultory talk about the industries of Jefferson, and the prosperity of the University.

Then Mr. Houston turned to Meta. "I feel guilty to have to tell you," he said, "and I may as well get it over,— that we didn't bring you a thing."

Meta opened her lips to reply, but before she could speak, Mrs. Houston explained, "Your father wanted to bring you a lot of presents from Minneapolis — we saw ever so many things that we thought you'd like. But I said, 'No,— Meta will think we are trying to make her like me, by bringing her bribes. We'll go without presents, and let her

take us on our own merits.'" There was a shy and almost pathetic attempt at humor in her voice.

Meta's lips twitched. "I like that," she said simply. "It would have enraged me if you had come with a lot of knick-knacks, like the Greeks bringing gifts."

"You were right, Alice," said Mr. Houston, looking over at his wife. "I perceive that feminine judgment outruns the masculine. I really didn't believe that a sapphire bar-pin would be scorned by any young miss, no matter what her state of mind might be."

"Sapphire pins are nothing, beside some other things," said Meta. "You have quite a lot to learn yet, Dad, about the way in which women regard things."

"So I see," remarked the father humbly.

"Score two for Mrs. Houston," Isabel exulted within herself. But she said aloud, "What Mr. Houston was saying makes me think of something I read the other day: 'There are three kinds of men who know nothing about women,— old men, middle-aged men, and young men.'"

They all laughed. But the constraint had not been dissipated. Meta relapsed into gloom, Mrs. Houston played nervously with her food, without eating, and Mr. Houston resumed his stern and grieved expression.

Isabel desperately brought up the subject of the play. "We're so desirous of seeing Meta in it," said Mrs. Houston. "We were afraid that Mr. Houston's business would keep him in St. Paul. But

he was able to see just the people he wanted to, and it came out all right."

"That's fine," answered Isabel, for Meta said nothing. One was left to infer that she thought it anything but fine.

"It must mean a great deal of work," Mrs. Houston was saying. "I know that my girls slave for weeks at a play, and this is really more important and more difficult than theirs — at least, I suppose there is a more critical audience."

"They are rather critical," admitted Isabel. She stole a look at Meta, who within the last few days had begun to feel the approaches of stage fright.

When dinner was over — and it seemed endlessly long — they all went up to the sitting-room which Mr. Houston had engaged. Isabel and Mrs. Houston kept up a cheerful conversation,— they had taken to each other from the first. Mr. Houston smoked a cigar, with his eyes on the ceiling. Meta sat listlessly in a red plush chair, and twisted a ring on her finger.

Presently Meta said, "I'm sorry, but I really must go. I have a dress-rehearsal, you know, and it's a crime to keep other people waiting."

Mr. and Mrs. Houston did not protest. They rose and stood politely, while the girls put on their wraps and gloves. There was a grim look on the face of the father, while pain and suppressed longing showed in the face of his wife.

"Good-night. I'll call you up in the morning, Dad," said Meta. "Good-night," she did not even shake Mrs. Houston's hand, but made a pretense of

being busy with the buttons of her jacket. Isabel's heart was very sore, as she noted her friend's unwillingness to yield even to the demands of courtesy. Mr. Houston went downstairs with the two girls, and put them on the car. Isabel could scarcely talk to Meta, and she confined herself to the barest necessities of speech.

She burst out with it all when she got home. "It's awful, mother," she said vehemently. "Meta isn't exactly rude, you know; she just escapes it. But she's as cold as an ice-berg, and she makes it very clear that she isn't going to melt, no matter what they do or say."

"It must be very painful for them," said Mrs. Carleton, with ready sympathy.

"It's frightful. They want to be so kind. I shouldn't blame them a bit if they packed up and left. Meta's too proud to give in, I'm afraid, and the visit can't be much pleasure to them, with her acting like a barbaric princess." She was thinking of what Meta had said that night that she and Isabel had talked on the porch, after the picnic across the lake: "I've always been so stubborn, and so proud of the fact that I never gave in"; and, "I haven't any idea that I'll ever be so meek again — no matter what happens."

"I thought that stubborn pride of hers was gone," said Mrs. Carleton. "She has seemed so subdued and reasonable and like other people."

"It's sufficiently in evidence now. These persons with the artistic temperament are enough to drive their friends mad." She was thinking of Fanny as well as of Meta. "But I suppose that in order to

be sensitive enough to produce an ' art form ' as Iola calls it, one can't be a wooden image in other ways."

" Perhaps not," said Mrs. Carleton, with a line between her eyes. " But Meta has a good deal of common sense, under her temperament, and things may come out better than the present situation would seem to indicate."

" They may," assented Isabel hopefully.

" We must ask the Houstons up for dinner," Mrs. Carleton went on. " Possibly I'd better call them up now. It isn't late."

The arrangement was soon made, by means of the telephone. The Houstons were planning to spend the next forenoon in motoring about the country near Jefferson, but they had no engagement for the evening, and were happy to accept the invitation for dinner.

With a sudden inspiration, Isabel said, over her mother's shoulder, " Ask Mrs. Houston if I mayn't go around with her a little, to-morrow afternoon. Meta has classes, and ever so many things to see to." Mrs. Houston seemed grateful for the suggestion, and added, " Your daughter and I have already become fast friends."

" I don't see how any one can be unkind to a charming lady such as she is," said Isabel, after Mrs. Carleton had hung up the receiver.

" Nor I," Mrs. Carleton replied. " Her voice and manner show what she is, even to one who has not seen her."

It was with eagerness that Isabel went down to the hotel, in the afternoon, to meet Mrs. Houston. The lady greeted her in the gracious way which was

one of her indefinable attractions. Mr. Houston had gone out; and the girl and the woman were soon chatting like long-lost relatives.

Isabel gathered that Meta had had luncheon with her father and mother, but that matters were not much improved. "She's busy all the afternoon," said Mrs. Houston; "so she couldn't go around with me, of course. Are you free, or am I keeping you from your classes?" She was putting on the beautiful hat with the white plumes, as she spoke.

"I had only one class, and it came right after lunch," answered Isabel. "So you're not keeping me from anything."

They went out, still chatting, and walked around the Capitol Square, noting the impressiveness of the State House, and the dignity of its carved pediments and friezes. "Let's go inside," suggested Isabel. "There are lovely marble fittings, and some good mural paintings that show the history of the State."

"I'd like to, very much," said Mrs. Houston.

As they went up the long walk, Isabel said with a somewhat studied carelessness, "Meta hasn't said anything about George Burnham, has she?"

"No, not to me," replied Mrs. Houston, "but Mr. Houston said that Meta had mentioned him in her letters. Who is he?"

"He's a young man who is one of our little group," Isabel explained. "He is a graduate of the Engineering School, and has been for two years in the office of the Department of Public Works, here in the Capitol. He's a friend of Rodney Fox — who is a friend of Meta's and mine." She laughed a little at the complicated relationship.

"Oh, yes, I've heard of Rodney Fox," said Mrs. Houston, while Isabel wondered what she had heard. "Do you think we shall meet Mr. Burnham?"

"He will probably call at the hotel to see you. He must know by this time that you are here," Isabel said, as they began the ascent of the flight of steps which led up to the huge bronze doors. "But we might stop at his office, and if he isn't too busy, he can take us up and show us the Senate Chamber and the pictures." She wanted George and Mrs. Houston to meet without the embarrassment which Meta's headstrong behavior might cause them; and she felt so properly chaperoned that even the Public Works office had no terrors for her. "Don't you think that would be permissible?" she asked.

"Why, I should think so," smiled the lady, with her friendly blue eyes on Isabel's. "Let's try."

They found Burnham without difficulty, and he came radiantly to the door. His "I'm very glad to meet Mrs. Houston," and his handshake seemed to mean more than he expressed. He was a most presentable figure, with his intelligent face, his thick unruly auburn hair, and well-fitting but not dandified clothes. Without being self-assertive, he had an air of energy and vivacity which usually made him acceptable to strangers. "Meta has told me a good deal about her father and — mother," he said. He hesitated on the last word, as if wondering what term he should use. "I was going to call at the hotel this evening."

"Then I'm very glad to see you now," said Mrs. Houston, "for we are not going to be in this evening."

"Can you show us about a little?" asked Isabel. "Mrs. Houston would like to see the Capitol, and I know so little about it. Are you too busy?"

"No, I'm delighted." The tone showed that he was. "Wait till I leave a message with my stenographer."

In a moment he joined them, and they walked about the corridors, looking at the fine marble work and the decorated panels. Then they took an elevator to the upper stories, where the pictures were to be found. Mrs. Houston had a way of winning the confidence of younger people. Before they had been long together, she had gathered a surprising amount of information about both George and Isabel — more than they had any idea they were giving.

After the pictures had been inspected, and the view from the windows duly praised, they all found themselves talking so intimately and so fast that they sat down on a marble bench in a hallway, to continue the conversation. Many things tripped from their tongues,— the wonders of the West, the prospects for war, the need of trained men, the ambition of George and Rodney to perfect themselves in construction work, the achievements and the present interests of Meta.

"Poor Meta," said George miserably, "she's scared stiff over the play. She seems to be losing her nerve. I haven't seen her for two days — she's been so busy — but the last time I saw her, I was worried; she was so nervous and so afraid of failing."

"I don't think it was altogether the play that bothered her," said Mrs. Houston with a downcast

look. "She hasn't been pleased about — some other things. But we must all stand by her," she continued hastily, "and see that she does herself credit — if faith and encouragement are what she needs."

"We can give her that," said Burnham in a low voice.

"I suppose we should be very generous with her," admitted Isabel, even though she was vexed with Meta. "She probably thinks she's having a hard trial."

"And if she thinks so, it's just as bad, for the time, at least, as if she were," said Mrs. Houston sympathetically. "I'm sure we can all afford to be patient."

George gave Meta's step-mother a grateful glance. When he left them, a few minutes later, at the outer door, his bright face was pleased and content.

"He's a fine young man, isn't he?" said Mrs. Houston, in what Isabel thought sounded like a relieved tone. "I've been wondering about him, in my secret heart, and hoping that he'd prove to be the right sort for a friend of Meta's."

Isabel could not help thinking how much better a showing George had made than Meta herself; and neither could she help admiring the forgiving kindness of Mrs. Houston. The girl was rejoicing within herself that her tiny plot had worked itself out so successfully. She had so much hoped that the Houstons would like George.

And now one more episode was to occur before the two women separated. Mrs. Houston be-

thought herself of a spool of silk which she needed, for a certain bit of repairing, and Isabel guided her to the appropriate shop. When they turned away from the counter, after making the purchase, they came face to face with a woman who gave Isabel a hard glance and was about to hurry by. "It's Mrs. Colby!" said Isabel to herself. It was the woman, a comparative newcomer in the town, whom Mrs. Carleton had so blandly insulted by neglect, some time before.

"Oh, Mrs. Colby!" said Isabel impulsively. She hardly knew what she was going to say. She had carried a note to the victim of the insult, but Mrs. Colby had been "not at home," and had never made any response to the note. The injured lady now turned a flushed face to Isabel, and then her eye wandered to the quietly elegant figure beside the girl. There was something about Mrs. Houston which commanded respect, and Mrs. Colby dearly loved fine clothes. She gave Isabel a stiff nod of recognition. And then, as the memory of the incident came back to her, Isabel began to laugh — not satirically, but merrily and infectiously. "Oh, Mrs. Colby, wasn't it absurd!" she cried. "I want you to meet Mrs. Houston — she's visiting in Jefferson. Mrs. Houston, such a funny thing happened at our house —" Breathlessly she began to retail the story of the blue silk dress which was to be made over, the man from the "Pantorium" pressing-shop, the grape-fruit and the hymn-tunes, the dreadful humiliation of Mrs. Carleton. She was so spontaneously amusing that they were soon in a gale of laughter, Mrs. Colby as well as the others. The

saleswomen pricked up their ears, wondering what this unusual hilarity was all about. Mrs. Houston topped the story with one even more ridiculous, about her forgetting some guests whom she had invited for dinner.

Mrs. Colby, still appraising the hat and the real lace and the pearl-and-diamond pin which Mrs. Houston wore, followed the other two out of the shop, and stood chatting amiably on the pavement. She was palpably rejoicing that an unpleasant episode had been disposed of so easily, and that a resentment of which she had been ashamed need no longer be cherished.

"Let's all go into this sweet-shop, and have some ice cream," suggested Mrs. Houston, as her eye was caught by the allurements of the "Palace of Sweets." "It's too bad to cut our acquaintance so short." She smiled irresistibly at Mrs. Colby, who accepted the invitation with no assumed willingness. They had a cheerful and harmonious conversation over the chocolate *parfait,* and Isabel, watching Mrs. Colby's mollified countenance, knew that the unpleasant episode was closed.

As they came out of the sweet-shop, Mrs. Colby said, "Tell your mother, Miss Carleton, that I am going to make another attempt to return her call. And by the way, when you are planning for your Fund, in the fall, come to me. I may be able to do something for it."

Isabel could have shouted for joy as she went on down the street with Mrs. Houston.

"Tell me about that Fund," said Mrs. Houston, as they walked back to the hotel.

Isabel needed no urging. With her words tumbling over one another, she told about Molly (somehow, it did not hurt, this time), and the maid who had *not* gone to Europe with Isabel and Mrs. Everard, and the starting of the Fund. Then she went on to the splendid things which it had accomplished; and before she knew it, she was telling about Sylvia Calderwood and her necessities, and the gift which Harriet Plover had so generously made. Mrs. Houston's eyes glowed at the recital.

"And now I must hurry home," said Isabel, a bit ashamed of her volubility. Mrs. Houston's friendliness had drawn her on too much, perhaps. "I'm so glad you are coming for dinner," she added with sincerity.

"So am I." Mrs. Houston held out a small white-gloved hand with an affectionate gesture.

On the car, Isabel was thinking of the pleasure she had taken in the company of Mrs. Houston. "Meta ought to see what she is losing by being so high-headed," she said to herself. "Mrs. Houston seems to have a way of adjusting and harmonizing things." And then she chuckled at the thought of carrying Mrs. Colby's conciliatory message to Mrs. Carleton.

At home, she delivered the message, with a shout at Mrs. Carleton's incredulous face, and the thankful expression which followed the assurance that the tale was true, with no joke attached to it. "I'm more pleased than I can say," sighed Mrs. Carleton, after they had talked it all over. "And now, dear, won't you get dressed as fast as you can, and help

to get the flowers and silver and such things on the table? Melissy is preparing what seems to me an appallingly elaborate dinner, and she needs help."

"Dee-lighted!" Isabel fled to her room to put on a dainty dress and rearrange her hair.

She went down to the dining room just in time to take a telephone message from Meta, excusing herself from coming to dinner. She was rushed with preparations for the play, and would have a hasty meal at the University caféteria. "She just doesn't want to come," thought Isabel. After polite protests, and expressions of regret, she accepted Meta's excuses, and turned away from the telephone.

She hurried to assist with the setting of the table, and bumped into Fanny, who was coming in from the kitchen with a dish of salted almonds. "Oh, you're enlisted in the service, too, are you?" said Isabel.

"I haven't much else to do nowadays," said Fanny drily; "that is, after my school work is done. I might as well be helping in the kitchen." This was the first time that Fanny had directly referred to her giving up of her lessons and practicing.

Melissy was just coming into the room, to get some lace-paper doilies from the drawer of the low-boy. But Isabel could not refrain from saying bitterly, "If you haven't anything else to do, it's your own fault, Fanny."

"Of course," answered Fanny, with tremulous self-control, "it must be my fault, because everything disagreeable always is. *You* never do anything that isn't perfect!"

"Now, Fanny Carleton,—" Isabel burst out in an exasperated tone.

But before she could go further, Melissy had faced the two girls and was pouring out the emotions which she had kept bottled up for days past. "I can't stand it," she cried with plaintive emphasis, "I just can't *stand* it to see things going on like this." She stood crushing the lace-paper in her shaking hands. "Miss Fanny was getting along so nice, and was so happy with her music; and Miss Isabel was so sweet and friendly-like, and so kind o' light-hearted with her studies, and her garden, and her good times. It seems as if it couldn't be that you'd both turned so sarcastic and hard-spoken."

The girls were staring at Melissy as if she were some stranger who had burst out with this attack. Still the passionate words went on. "I never had no home, and no chance to *be* anybody, and it's been such a treat to stay here with you young folks. You've been so good to me, it hasn't seemed as if I was working for pay, but just as if I was a — a kind of sister or cousin, or something. And it cuts me to the heart to see you two at odds with each other, like common ordinary girls that never had no training." Fanny and Isabel looked into each other's eyes with a startled glance, and then looked back at Melissy. "If I had a sister," the maid was going on, "you wouldn't ketch me squabbling with her. I'd just go up to her, and put my arms around her neck, and I'd say, 'I don't care who was to blame, whether I was, or whether you was,— we got to keep on loving each other just the same. There ain't no

violin nor any high-sterics that can spoil our happiness,' I'd say. I know I'm awful forward, to go saying such things to you girls, but I can't keep still no longer. I can't *stand* seeing you go on like this! Oh, Land o' Goshen, I bet I've scorched my cream-sauce!" With a wild realization of the havoc which her neglect might be causing in the kitchen, Melissy made a dive for the swinging door, and was gone.

Isabel was standing stiffly at one side of the spread table, and Fanny was gazing hypnotically at her from the other. The faces of both had grown very flushed and shamed. For a long minute, neither made a motion. Then Fanny very deliberately turned, and went to the telephone-closet, which opened from the dining room. She left the door open, while with exaggerated calmness she took down the receiver and called a certain number.

"May I speak with Herr Reuter?" she asked, when the proper connections had been made. A moment later she was saying, "Oh, Herr Reuter, this is Fanny Carleton. May I have a lesson tomorrow — a long one? And may I have three this next week? Thank you, ever so much. . . . I'm rusty. I haven't been practicing, but I'm going to make up for lost time. . . . Oh, I just thought I'd take a vacation. . . . No, I'm all right now. . . . Yes, I'll be there. Thank you, Herr Reuter."

When Fanny had finished, Isabel was standing at the door. Fanny put her head down on her sister's shoulder for a second, and then she said as if nothing had happened, "If we don't hurry up and get

this table set, the guests'll have to enlist in the service." A loud crash sounded from the kitchen, as a kettle-cover fell to the floor; but Melissy had burst into song.

CHAPTER XV

A WAND OF KINDNESS

THE night of the play had come, and Isabel was with Meta in the dressing-room of the Opera House. During the day Meta had become more and more excited and rebellious, and now she was in an intolerable state of tension, obsessed by the idea that nothing could keep her from failing. In a peacock-blue silk kimono, with heavy embroidery upon it, Meta sat in the chair before the mirror, twisting her fingers together with every evidence of panic.

"I can't go on — I can't!" she was saying. "I'm absolutely in despair. I know I shall fail. Oh, if they hadn't come just when they did! What was the use of their coming on here and ruining my peace of mind, at this particular time?"

Isabel started to say something about other people's peace of mind. But she checked herself, and said instead, "Did you decide to wear that band in your hair, in the third act, or not?"

"I don't know," answered Meta with an impatient shake of her shoulders. "I don't suppose I'll ever get so far as the third act. I'm going to make a terrible muddle of this thing. I can't even remember the lines. I shall be disgraced forever."

Isabel was pretty well convinced of the same thing,

but she did not dare to say so. "Meta, can't I do anything for you?" she asked desperately.

"No, no!" Meta was almost irritable in her reply. "You've stood by me like a sister, and I'm not worth it. I'm hurting you, and making a public failure of myself, but I can't help it. And nobody can do anything for me."

"Won't you —?" Isabel hesitated. She meant, Won't you see Mrs. Houston, and be friends with her?

But Meta said hastily, "No, I won't. I can't see anybody now."

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Through the thin partition they heard the noise of scenes sliding into place, the voices of workmen, the buzz of gossip from the actors already out of their dressing-rooms.

There was a tap at the door. Isabel glanced at Meta, who whispered fiercely, "I can't see any one. Don't let 'em in."

Isabel opened the door a crack. Mrs. Houston stood there, very lovely in a pale blue satin evening gown, with a twist of filmy white maline about the shoulders. A feathery ornament in her hair gave her unusual height and dignity. "I want to come in," she said, in a quiet tone which showed that she was used to being obeyed.

Isabel lingered in indecision. She feared the wrath of Meta, but she could not resist the firm, expectant tone of Mrs. Houston. An instant later she stepped back and threw open the door.

Meta had risen, and was shrinking against the dressing table, her long silk robe sweeping about her,

her head very high. She looked forbidding enough to awe a less determined soul than that of her stepmother.

"Can't I do something for you, Meta?" asked Mrs. Houston in a gentle voice.

"Nothing that I know of, thank you," Meta answered with an adamantine glance.

"You aren't fit to go on as you are," said Mrs. Houston, pityingly. Her keen yet kindly eyes had taken in every sign of Meta's desperate nervousness.

"I should be, if I hadn't had so much to worry me," returned the girl, with accusing bitterness.

Isabel looked for some show of resentment in Mrs. Houston, at the injustice of Meta's remark. But the lady only said, "I'm sorry you have been worried, dear."

Meta bit her lip. "Perhaps it couldn't be helped," she said, seeking to control herself.

But Mrs. Houston was not listening. She held out her arms. "My poor child," she said tenderly, "don't you see that we *have* to love each other?"

Meta faced her for a moment, like a barbaric princess,— her eyes blazing, her beauty heightened by the rouge upon her cheeks. Then suddenly the antagonism faded out of her face. It seemed as if the blood faded, too, leaving her cheeks white, with the daubs of rouge standing out vividly upon them. She trembled, hesitated, and then swept forward into the arms waiting to receive her. "Oh, mother, mother!" she cried brokenly. "Oh, mother, mother, mother!"

She was holding the frail lady in her strong arms,

and kissing her on the cheek. "What a terrible creature I've been. I'm so ashamed, so dreadfully ashamed," she kept repeating, her face hidden against the older woman's hair. They were both oblivious of the observer in the room.

Mrs. Houston was patting Meta on the shoulder, and saying, "There, there, never mind. It's all over now. It's all over." Isabel found her throat tightening. She turned away for a moment, with her forehead against the panels of the door. When she turned back, Meta and her mother were both wiping their eyes. There was a spot of rouge on Mrs. Houston's cheek, where Meta's had pressed against it. Mrs. Houston was the first to gain her composure. "You must get dressed, Meta, dear," she said. "It will soon be time for the curtain to go up."

Meta was half laughing and half sobbing. She rearranged her hair before the glass, then wheeled and put her hands on the slender woman's shoulders. "The first minute I saw you," she confessed, "I knew I should love you. I loved you all along. But it was my pride — that terrible pride of mine —"

"Not yours any more," said the mother softly. "We've seen the last of it. Now get on your dress."

"I'll help," said Isabel, feeling that they had forgotten that she was there. Between them, they hurried the dazed young actress into the rose-colored morning-dress, which she was to wear in the first act. In a few minutes Meta was herself again.

She was a radiant picture as she stood before them, her face lighted by happiness. "My mind

is clear as air, now," she said calmly. "Everything is going to be all right."

"We're sure it is." Mrs. Houston's hand was laid on Meta's arm caressingly.

Miss Henderson peeped into the dressing-room, and gave a nod of satisfaction. "All ready?" she asked.

"The sooner it comes, the better," answered Meta with a smile.

Now the signal ran through the dressing-rooms and the wings. The tenseness in the atmosphere increased. Isabel, Mrs. Houston, and Meta made their way to the open space near the entrance through which Meta was to make her appearance upon the stage. Wilfred Collins was pacing back and forth, in the irreproachable business suit in which he was to take his part in the first act. Miss Bloch, Miss Sellers and others, were hovering about with scared faces and uneasy hands.

All at once, the curtain was up. There were several minutes of talk upon the stage before Meta was to appear. She held Mrs. Houston's hand, and Isabel stood back, watching them gratefully. Then came the cue for which Meta was waiting. She ran lightly out upon the stage. A quick flutter of applause attested the success which she had won in times past. Isabel saw at a glance that Meta was completely at her ease. Her full laughing voice, the sureness of her speech and motion, the lack of self-consciousness, showed how completely her state of mind had been transformed.

"She's safe now," breathed Mrs. Houston; and she gave a long sigh.

"Perfectly," whispered Isabel.

"Aren't we happy?" murmured Mrs. Houston in the space during which, in the play, Meta was sitting silently at a desk.

"As larks," assented Isabel, gayly. Then she added, "Now that it is started, don't you want to go out in front and sit with Mr. Houston?"

"I will at the end of the act, but not now."

Together they watched as the play went on, both absorbed in the promise of the young woman whom they loved. "She'll never be so proud again," thought Isabel. "This is the completion of the year's development for her."

When the act was over, Meta dashed off the stage, still in the exaltation in which her work always left her.

"It's going beautifully," said Mrs. Houston with glowing eyes.

"If you think so, it's all right," said Meta eagerly. "Oh, I hope Dad likes it!"

"I'm going out to sit with him now," Mrs. Houston replied. "I want to see the rest of the play from the audience."

"Run along," laughed Meta, "and tell Dad — you know what!" She was anticipating her father's relief over the good news.

"Oh, yes. I know." Mrs. Houston hurried away. Miss Henderson was glaring. Isabel went with Meta to the dressing-room for the change of costume. They said little while the process of dressing was going on, and Meta walked back on the stage with the utmost self-possession.

The second act passed as satisfactorily as the

first. The third act was the most dramatic of the play, requiring the most careful acting. Now came the task of arraying Meta in the corn-colored gown. Madame LaVoy, of the Little White Beauty Parlor, was there to arrange Meta's hair, and gave her make-up a touch of perfection. Shoes were changed for gold brocaded slippers. "Now!" Isabel drew a long breath. The gown went on, and was shaken into the right lines. The sash was fastened; the laces at the front were pinned with an old amber brooch which had belonged to Meta's own mother. A long jet chain and a fan of black ostrich feathers brought out the glow of yellow silk and tulle; but most of all the beauty of the gown was set off by the girl's dark eyes and hair. Isabel clasped her hands. "Oh, Meta, you're a dream!" she cried. "I told you you'd look like a bird of paradise, and you do."

Meta smiled absently. She was not thinking of her looks, no matter how important they might be. "Go out before the curtain goes up," she said, giving Isabel a gentle shove. "Hurry."

Isabel slipped away and found the seat which had been held for her, at the end of the second row. No one whom she knew well was near her; hence she could stare and listen as she chose. When the curtain rose, there was a rustle of approval, as Meta was disclosed sitting upon a purple velvet sofa.

Isabel had seen some good acting while she was in Europe, but she was not, of course, a skilled critic. Meta's acting seemed to her very excellent. What impressed her chiefly was the restraint which the young actress exhibited. "That comes of being

too proud to reveal everything she has in her soul," said Isabel. Meta's motions were not always graceful; but where she failed in grace, she excelled in originality and sincerity. "I think she's perfectly splendid," voted the loyal friend.

Isabel noticed a keen-looking man with Professor Lenner — a man of the world, apparently, who had a more dashing appearance than most of the Jefferson folk. He was watching Meta earnestly, and now and then he whispered a comment to his companion. When they came to the scene which Isabel remembered particularly, because she had seen it in process of creation — the one including the letter, and the question, "Did you write this, Althea?"— the strange gentleman clapped noiselessly at Meta's speeches, and whispered again to Professor Lenner, who nodded and beamed.

"He likes it," Isabel decided; "and I'm sure his opinion counts."

The play went on smoothly to the end, and it seemed as if Meta grew more and more sure of herself, more at ease and capable all the time. When the curtain fell there was long and enthusiastic applause.

Isabel ran in behind the stage. Meta was answering curtain calls with Wilfred Collins, who had covered himself with glory. But it was apparent that Meta was the great success of the evening. Her whole radiant personality spoke of relief and happiness. Just as she came back from one of the curtain-calls, a big sheaf of yellow roses was handed to her by a messenger boy. She glanced at the card with a quick smile. "George sent these," she said

to Isabel. She carried them out for her last appearance, leaving the heap of American Beauties, and pink carnations, and lilies-of-the-valley on a bench in the wings.

Miss Henderson, mightily relieved, was flying about, shaking hands with every one; and proud parents and friends began to pour in through the entrance from the auditorium to the back of the stage. The Carletons came in for a moment, and then hastened away, for they had preparations to make at home. George Burnham appeared, ill-concealing his exultation. "You take a fellow's breath away," he said to Meta in a low tone.

"He'll get it back," Meta answered laughingly. He held out his hand, and she laid hers in it for a second.

"We're going to have a little gathering at our house this evening, in honor of our celebrated actress," said Isabel, "and you must come along, George. Mother told me to ask you."

"Awfully glad to," said George gratefully.

Mr. Houston now appeared, looking very distinguished in evening dress. Mrs. Houston stood back while her husband took Meta's hand in both his own. "Good girl. You've made us proud and happy," was all he said, but his spirited face expressed much more. Mrs. Houston merely gave Meta a hug, and said nothing.

Others were crowding up to offer congratulations, and it was some time before Meta could get away. In the meantime, Isabel was gathering up clothes and trinkets in the dressing-room, and stuffing them into a suit-case.

"I have a cab for the star," said Mr. Houston as Isabel appeared again, "and for Miss Isabel —"

"The satellite," completed the faithful young friend.

The gathering at the Carletons' was composed only of the two families, with Rodney Fox and George Burnham. The festive lateness of the hour; the abundance of Meta's flowers, temporarily displayed in bowls and jars; the gayety of evening dress, made the assemblage unusually vivacious. There was ice cream of the rich homemade variety, with sandwiches and cake, which Melissy dispensed from flat baskets. The rooms resounded with lively talk. Meta's success, and her reconciliation with her new mother made the occasion one of particular importance to the group of friends.

Mr. and Mrs. Houston and the two girls were eating ice cream on the big sofa in the sitting-room, when Mr. Houston said abruptly, as he fixed his penetrating glance on Isabel, "Well, what are you going to do this summer, do you think?"

"Stay at home, I suppose," answered Isabel, "and dig in my garden."

"You've guessed wrong," said Mr. Houston decisively. "Alice, tell her what she's going to do."

"You're to visit us, in the West, Miss Goldilocks," said Mrs. Houston simply.

Isabel jumped, and nearly dropped her ice cream into her lap. "Oh, I don't think so," she said hurriedly. "I'd love to, but I don't see how I can." She looked uncertainly from one to another of the friendly faces.

Meta did not seem surprised, so that Isabel suspected that she was already in the secret.

"We want you. We want you very much, my dear." Mrs. Houston laid her hand on Isabel's knee. "When Meta's ticket comes,— her father always sends her one, you know — there will be one for you, too."

"Oh!" Isabel looked startled and dubious. She did not think she ought to accept so generous a gift from these people, who, for all her love for them, were not a part of "the family."

"We can do that much," said Mr. Houston, "for all that you and your family have done for Meta."

"I'm afraid I don't deserve so much," said Isabel, thinking of discords which had arisen between her and Meta. "But I'm wild to see the West, and I'd love to be with all of you." She turned and smiled at Meta, who was not saying a word, but listening intently. "I thought when I was asked to go to Europe, that that was good fortune enough to last a life-time. And now comes this! Have you said anything to mother?"

"Yes, I whispered to her when she took me upstairs to leave my wraps," said Mrs. Houston. "She says it's all right."

Isabel saw her mother giving Melissy directions about more ice cream or some such thing. She could not catch the maternal eye; but if Mrs. Carleton had told Mrs. Houston it was all right, it must be. "I can hardly believe that I'm going," she said. "It seems too good to be true."

"It's true, though, and it's tremendously good," spoke up Meta. "And, oh, Isabel, we'll take you

out on a ranch, and up into the mountains, and teach you to fish for trout, and to ride a broncho; and we'll show you Helena and Seattle, and the Sound, and the totem-pole, and the Indians, and the glaciers, and the pine forests, and the gold mines, and —"

Isabel was waving her hands wildly. "Don't tell me any more," she protested. "You make my head go round. Oh, it's too lovely to think that I can really, really see all those things. It's like reading a novel, and wishing you were the heroine."

"You'll be the heroine of this novel," said Mr. Houston with satisfaction. "And now there's something more." He looked across the room, to where Rodney and George were talking with Fanny and Celia — the latter very sleepy, but determined to keep awake and not miss anything. He beckoned with his plate of ice cream. "Come over here, boys, if the ladies can spare you," he said. The two young men came over to the sofa, Fanny and Celia hovering in the background. "Mrs. Houston, who is a sort of fairy god-mother to young people," Mr. Houston began, "has been telling me that there are two young lads about your size who want to get engineering jobs for the summer." Rodney and George stared uncertainly. "Well, I know a man who is doing some construction work in the mountains. He wants chaps like you, who have had the right sort of instruction, to help in carrying out his plans, overseeing the workmen, and so on. How would that suit you?"

"Suit us!" shouted the young men in one breath. "That certainly would suit us down to the ground. Do you think you could get us in?"

"Nothing easier," Mr. Houston replied. "I can fix it in a minute. I'll telegraph as soon as I get back to the hotel." He spoke with the ease of a man who habitually settles the affairs of others, and transacts the most vital affairs by telegraph.

Isabel and Meta were speechless, but they gave each other expressive looks. "What did I say?" Rodney was exclaiming. "Didn't I prophesy that we could carry on our trade on the bank of a trout-stream, and under the greenwood tree?"

"Of all the effrontery," said George. "You were howling calamity, and predicting that we'd be cooped up next to a brick wall all summer. I was the one who bolstered up your failing hope. Well, we certainly are grateful to you, Mr. Houston, for helping us out in this way. It's exactly what we were awfully anxious to get. We can't thank you enough."

"I should say not," supplemented Rodney. "We're delirious with delight. We hope that your friend won't regret employing us," he added more soberly. "We'll do the very best we can."

"I'm sure of that," said Mr. Houston. "Did you know," he went on, "that the two young ladies here"— he waved his hand toward Isabel and Meta —"were going West for the summer, too?"

"No!" The young engineers gazed incredulously at the girls. "Of course we knew that Meta might —"

"Isabel's going, too." Mr. Houston's eyes were twinkling with the satisfaction of the fairy godfather. He was very happy himself, and he wanted every one else to be happy.

"Oh, say! that's splendid!" cried George. He was looking at Meta. Rodney was looking at Isabel, and not saying anything.

"I shouldn't wonder if some sort of juggling would arrange things so that we could all be together in the mountains for a while," said Mrs. Houston.

"All we'd have to do would be to rub the lamp or call up the traveling carpet," laughed Isabel, her cheeks very red.

"Maybe we couldn't have a good time among ourselves — eh, boys and girls?" queried Mr. Houston.

"Oh, maybe not!" the young people chorused.

They were all on their feet now, and the Carletons had joined them. There was a babel of exclamations, congratulations, suggestions, plans, and anticipations.

"Is it all right, Mumsey?" whispered Isabel to her mother, under cover of the confusion.

"Perfectly," answered Mrs. Carleton. "You will be in the best of hands, and the experience will do you good. The life we lead here gets too strained and sophisticated at times."

"Too much so for the harmony of the family," Isabel replied with a guilty look. "Well, console yourself. When I come back, I'll probably be so simplified that I'll want to live on smoked fish and wear a blanket, with my hair down my back."

"I'm not looking for quite that transformation," sighed Mrs. Carleton. Isabel slipped her arm around her mother's waist.

Mr. and Mrs. Houston were going away the next

day, so that there was a great deal of talking to do. Celia fell asleep in an arm-chair, and Fanny dragged her, drunk with drowsiness, to the upper regions. It was a late hour when the party broke up, with plans for meeting at the station the next day, when the Houstons were starting for Chicago, thence to go back to the West.

The Houstons had departed; and Rodney and Isabel were sitting in the arbor in the back yard, after coming home from the station. Meta had gone for a canoe ride with George Burnham,— it was Saturday, and George was free in the afternoon. The Carletons had scattered to their individual occupations.

Isabel was holding her green silk hand-bag against her white skirt, as if the gay little "reticule" held something very precious. "Wasn't it too lovely of Mrs. Houston to give me this for the Fund?" she said joyously. She took out of her hand-bag a slip of blue paper. "Fifty whole dollars! Miss X. Y. Z." (she had not thought it right to reveal Sylvia Calderwood's name) "will be unspeakably relieved to see that she really has enough to get through the summer session with." Isabel gazed at the check as if it were some masterpiece of art. "It just puts the button on the cap of the climax to have this worked out so beautifully."

"Mrs. Houston seems to have a way of working things out," answered Rodney. "She's so quiet about it, you don't know anything is going on; and then all at once, it comes to light, complete."

"Yes," Isabel responded. "How I shall enjoy being with her. And what a magnificent summer we're all going to have!"

"My head is still going round," said Rodney. "I can hardly believe that the matter is settled, but it is. Don't you feel sorry about leaving your garden?" He glanced out at the fair clean rows and clumps of plants, some budded, and some in bloom.

"I do, dreadfully," said Isabel. "But Fanny says she will look after it. And Melissy will never let a weed show its head,— she's that savage kind with weeds — figurative and literal." She laughed affectionately at the thought of Melissy's thoroughness. "The garden would have to come out all right, anyway, when so many other things have been perfectly adjusted."

"It almost seems like a fairy god-mother's work, doesn't it?" Rodney was watching a blue butterfly floating at the door of the arbor. "It has all come about with the touch of a wand."

"That wand is kindness, I think," said Isabel earnestly. "The Houstons might have come and gone without having a bit of influence on any of us, if they hadn't been so kind at heart."

"That's so," Rodney replied. "It counts for a lot, doesn't it?"

"Life appears to be, as I've said before," ruminated Isabel, "chiefly muddle within muddle."

"It looks like it." Rodney's brown eyes were smiling whimsically. "But after all, that's what makes life interesting."

They were silent for a few moments. The sound of Fanny's violin came to them from the house.

Fanny was playing the Bohemian folk-song which had been the cause of a discouraging complication.

"Thank heaven, the muddles get straightened out after a while," said Isabel with a sigh.

"They always will," said Rodney.

THE END

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